

The politics of identity and difference in intercultural management  
communication: an Anglo-German study

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*I dedicate this work to my grandparents Peter and Margaret Kemp whose love and support have always been unconditional.*

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## **Abstract**

Central to the international management (IM) literature is the notion that dealing with difference is an inevitable and problematic consequence of managing across national or cultural boundaries. This thesis seeks to ‘trouble’ the ways in which difference is conventionally theorised by IM researchers. It aims to question the purported nature of difference as an objective category of analysis and to establish the role of national culture in accounting for difference.

Based on an interdisciplinary framework which conceptualises difference as a product of social interaction, the thesis documents the design and execution of an 18-month multi-method (participant observation, transcription, unstructured interviewing) research study of five managers (three ‘German’, two ‘British’) working within an intercultural context. A reading of the data produces three key findings. Firstly it suggests that national culture is of marginal importance in accounting for difference. Secondly it demonstrates that while difference may have the quality of appearing concrete and hard-edged to social actors, it is also a shifting and contested phenomenon dependent on those very social actors for its existence. Thirdly it highlights a discursive politics of difference which previous research has masked.

By denaturalising some of the field’s conventional wisdom on difference, and affirming a linguistic re-conceptualisation of the construct, this thesis makes a contribution to the development of interdisciplinary and critical research in international management.



## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Summary

*This introductory chapter aims to familiarise the reader with the key theoretical and substantive themes of this thesis. Section 1.2 begins by contextualising the topic of this project, that of difference, highlighting its increasing importance as a substantive concern for a number of divergent academic disciplines. Section 1.3 places difference more specifically into the context of international management research, or IMR, which forms the main literature base for this research. Having outlined the role of difference in IMR, section 1.4 states the main aim and objectives which the project sets out to address, and 1.5 gives a brief outline of the empirical investigation developed to respond to these theoretical concerns. The chapter concludes in section 1.6 with an overview of the structure of the thesis, intended to give the reader a feel for the project in its entirety.*

### 1.2 Contextualising Difference

This thesis is about difference, a construct which has received increasing attention in recent years from a variety of academic and lay sources. In terms of academic interest, disciplines ranging from sociolinguistics, cross-cultural pragmatics, conversation analysis and ethnomethodology, to social psychology, social anthropology and social theory, have all developed particular understandings and thus approaches to the study of difference. These variously accented accounts have rendered difference a polysemous concept which readily displays the capacity to take divergent meanings depending on the disciplinary perspective applied to it. So, whilst difference might simply refer to a misunderstanding or a disagreement between social actors engaged in conversation, which ethnomethodologists or conversation analysts might seek to address as a matter of breakdown or rupture in talk, it might equally refer to the phenomenon of social and cultural fragmentation, a particular concern of social theorists interested in the theorisation of late capitalist, or postmodern, society. This thesis understands difference to refer to things like culture, gender, ethnicity, age, generation, sexuality, class or physical ability, and the ways in which these ‘markers’ are actively combined by social actors in the simultaneous construction of the Self and the Other.

In this regard, the recent emergence of the discipline of cultural studies has been a central academic site for the investigation of difference, and thus a key agent in the theoretical and empirical development of such an understanding of the construct. Cultural studies researchers have been seminal in promoting interdisciplinary and, more especially, political conceptions of difference which transcend the disciplinary concerns and confines of some of the areas listed above. Rather than considering difference as a linguistic function or the result of a breakdown in talk, cultural studies researchers have preferred to look at difference *inter alia* as a construction embedded in the negotiation of sociocultural identities by social actors, emphasising in particular its emergence through some of the wider discursive markers mentioned at the end of the previous paragraph. In sum, difference has become the empirical vehicle for diverse and often contested applications of academic theorisation. However, it is not just increasing academic attention which has highlighted difference as an important concern for contemporary social scientists or cultural theorists. Lay sources such as the press, for example in its coverage of institutional racism within the Police Force highlighted by the recent Stephen Lawrence inquiry, have brought the topic of difference as a societal phenomenon once again into the public sphere. Not only is difference a matter for academic study then, it is also an everyday social reality which affects and is effected by all members of society.

In relation to this particular study, it is the enhanced corporate and organisational lay interest in the construct of difference which is of prime concern. As large organisations have become increasingly enmeshed in marketplaces which are socially and culturally different to their own, fuelled to a great extent by the self-enforcing discourse of globalisation, many have encountered strategic and operational difficulties in accomplishing their corporate objectives. Such issues have impelled large corporations to consider what is causing these difficulties and, importantly, how they might be



managed such that they cease to create further problem. And it is this (primarily US) practitioner agenda which has, to a very large extent, driven (again primarily US) academic interest in the area. Of course these corporate concerns do not constitute a 'new' phenomenon; they have emerged in consonance with the globalisation of the world economy in the post-war period. As chapter two points out, the academic response to this emergent practitioner agenda has involved a variety of accounts of difference broadly contained within the rubric of international management research, or IMR. It is international management, both as a subject of study as well as an everyday activity, which forms the theoretical and empirical context for this project's exploration of difference.

### **1.3 The Construct of Difference in IMR**

A key assumption in the international management literature is that difference is an inevitable and problematic consequence of managing across national or cultural boundaries. In a sense then, both theorists and practitioners come to international management with difference 'in mind'. As alluded to above, this perception has led to the emergence of a number of distinct areas of theorisation contained under the umbrella term IMR. These areas include organisational universalism, based on the work of the Aston School, culturist and institutionalist theory, cross-cultural management and diversity management. These areas of study have not developed concomitantly, but largely in chronological sequence and extending from critiques made of their respective predecessor e.g. culturist and institutionalist theory grew out of dissatisfaction with universalist accounts of difference. Each of these areas takes a particular view on the topic of difference. Whereas organisational universalists for example believe that difference is a facet of organisational structure which transcends cultural boundaries, cross-cultural management theorists by contrast regard difference

as a matter of divergent work-related values and attitudes which can be primarily explained with recourse to the notion of national culture.

As part of this thesis, I will review and critique each of these particular instantiations of international management research, showing how they provide divergent accounts of the construct of difference. More importantly however, this thesis will suggest that these divergences are largely a cosmetic issue. To this end, a discursive analysis of these areas will show that the construction of difference in IMR is underpinned by a predominant theoretical orthodoxy founded on the discourses of functionalism, normal science and managerialism. The consequence of these prevalent discourses in IMR, as I will highlight, has been the naturalisation of the assumption that difference is an objective category of analysis that can be delineated and scientifically measured for the strategic benefit of the corporation. This relative homogeneity and strong theoretical orthodoxy of IM approaches to difference stands in sharp relief to the wider context of theoretical pluralism presented in section 1.2.

Against this background, the present thesis sets out to contribute to the interdisciplinary development of international management research, thus acknowledging that there exist perspectives outside the disciplinary confines of IMR which might fruitfully add to the theoretical and methodological development of the field. Drawing upon insights from social and organisational theory, and cultural studies, this project aims to bring a more ‘critical’ perspective to the theorisation of difference, that is one which attempts to ‘trouble’ the conventional assumptions of previous IMR and to bring new insight into the discipline.



## 1.4 Research Aim and Objectives

Having contextualised this research and given an indication of its guiding ethos, this section states the key aim and objectives which the thesis develops and subsequently pursues. This is necessarily brief since they will be substantiated at much greater length in chapters two and three in particular. In short, **the central aim of this thesis is to challenge the conventional wisdom of IMR by exploring processes of identification and differentiation within an intercultural management setting.** The couching of the research aim in this particular form is based upon a particular theorisation of difference presented in chapter three of the thesis. Firstly, it will be suggested that difference is a product of social interaction which emerges through processes of communication. Secondly, and importantly, these processes will have an intercultural dimension to them in order to reflect the substantive concerns of the base literatures presented in chapter two. This research aim provides an overall framework for the investigation of three particular issues which emanate from the literature reviews. These three issues provide the basis for the specific research objectives presented as follows:

- 1. To examine the role of national culture in accounting for difference in international management settings.**
- 2. To scrutinise the extent to which difference might be described as an objective category of analysis.**
- 3. To explore the political nature of processes of identification and differentiation.**

As mentioned above, each of these objectives emanates from concerns identified in the literature reviews presented in chapters two and three and as such, an expansion on each of these themes will be found in these subsequent parts of the thesis. Having now clarified the key aim and objectives which this thesis will pursue, I now move to give again necessarily brief information on the empirical investigation carried out to address these issues.

## **1.5 Research Study**

In order to address the aims and objectives of this thesis, an 18-month multi-method research study was designed and executed between June 1996 and January 1998. The study focused on the social interactions of five managers (two 'British', three 'German') called Cameron, Pete, Hans, Dieter and Vera who worked for two organisations, one called Bigtruck based in the Central Belt of Scotland, and the other named Bergbau located in Dortmund, Germany. In order to capture the elements of these interactions deemed most relevant to the project as a whole, I used a number of different research methods, principally participant observation, unstructured interviewing, audio recording and transcription, and document collection. The use of multiple methods was aimed at gaining as much depth and context to the managers' interactions as possible. A full account of this study will be given in chapter four. In closing this introductory chapter, the following section provides an overview of the structure of the thesis as a whole.

## **1.6 Structure of the Thesis**

Following this introduction, chapter two will present the first of two literature reviews. As mentioned above, this chapter will review and critique the main areas which comprise international management research, or IMR. It sets out to explore the ways in which these areas have conceptualised the notion of difference, with a particular view to illuminating the discursive effects of functionalism, normal science and managerialism in normalising particular assumptions about difference. In short it will be suggested that on account of these discourses, difference is believed to be a hard social fact which exists independently of human consciousness or language, and that objective, value-free and strategically useful knowledge can be gained about it through scientific measurement.



Based upon this critical exploration of the IMR literature, chapter three will go on to devise a non-functionalist and non-managerialist conceptual framework for the empirical study of difference. Drawing upon readings of ideas emanating from social and organisational theory, and cultural studies, the chapter will ultimately present an interdisciplinary framework based on two key concepts of the 'labour of division' (Munro, 1997; Parker, 1997) and the post-colonial writer Edward Said's (1978) discursive notion of Orientalism. These ideas suggest that difference is an active accomplishment of social actors based upon the mobilisation of particular 'divisions' which, drawing upon Said's understanding of discourse, act politically in social and organisational contexts to privilege certain identities whilst simultaneously marginalising others.

Taking this conceptual framework forward, chapter four will report upon the design and execution of an empirical investigation aimed at eliciting data which will enable me to address the key aim and objectives of this research. It will report on key methodological and research design issues such as sampling and site selection, methodological perspective, choice of research methods, the unfolding of the research process and strategies for analysing the data.

Chapter five will present and interpret the main findings of the research study. It takes the key division articulated by the managers between difference which they believed was cultural in nature, and difference which they deemed purely a matter of business, and uses it to construct a semiotic square. Rather than following the particular logic which is conventionally applied to semiotic squares, chapter five mobilises it as a hermeneutic tool for the organisation and substantiation of the findings. It will cover the key categories of comparative cultural constructs and constructs of management

rationality which are created by the managers in constructing identity and difference, and then subject them to critique using a Saidian inspired discourse analysis.

Having outlined the key findings of the empirical study, chapter six will go on relate them to the international management and social theoretical literatures reviewed in chapters two and three. Using the research questions as a broad framework for organising this commentary, the chapter will tease out the key theoretical implications of my empirical fieldwork for these corpi of research, showing where they undermine, support or add to the approaches or arguments of previous authors.

The final chapter seven will bring this thesis to a close. It will provide a summary of the thesis as a whole and draw together the main conclusions of this project, stating and assessing its perceived contribution to knowledge. In this regard, three key points will be presented. Firstly it will be suggested that national culture is of marginal importance in accounting for difference. Secondly it will be demonstrated that whilst difference might have the quality of appearing concrete and hard-edged to social actors, it is also a shifting and contested phenomenon dependent on those very social actors for its existence. Thirdly the thesis will highlight a discursive politics of difference which previous research has masked. It will ultimately be concluded that by denaturalising some of IMR's conventional wisdom on difference and offering an alternative conception of its emergence in social action, this thesis makes a contribution to the development of interdisciplinary and critical research in international management. Following these points, the chapter will close by considering the limitations of the project and point to pertinent directions in which interested future researchers might wish to take some of the issues contained within this thesis. Having now introduced the key themes of this thesis, the following chapter will present a review of the various areas which comprise international management research.



### A DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS OF NORMAL SCIENTIFIC AND MANAGERIALIST CONCEPTIONS OF DIFFERENCE IN INTERNATIONAL MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

#### 2.1. Summary

*The objective of this chapter is to review and critique conceptualisations of difference within the various literatures which comprise international management research (henceforth IMR). Specifically, it sets out to illuminate the ways in which IMR's discursive orthodoxies of functionalism, normal science and managerialism have served to structure and subsequently normalise particular understandings of difference. In this regard, the chapter suggests that within IMR, difference is conventionally assumed to be a brute social fact which exists independently of human consciousness and language, and that objective, value-free and strategically useful knowledge can be gained about it through scientific measurement. Following an introduction in section 2.2, section 2.3 sets the context for these arguments by providing the reader with an overview of the development of IMR. Section 2.4 concentrates on the area of **comparative management studies** and outlines the influence of normal science on the organisational theory of the Aston School and its subsequent reconfiguration in institutionalist and culturist research. In the latter part of this section, Anglo-German studies and the seminal work of Geert Hofstede (1980) provide an important base for a critique of normal scientific approaches to the study of comparative management, particularly as it relates to the concept of national culture, a privileged explanant of difference in IMR. Section 2.5 extends this analysis by looking at the role of managerialism in the two sub-categories of **cross-cultural management research**, namely cross-national and diversity management. Critique here is levelled at the way in which corporate managerialist discourse has turned difference into a strategic commodity which can be managed for the benefit of the organisation. The chapter draws to a close in section 2.6 by arguing that what ties all these discursive strands together is the fact that they have been driven by a strong (primarily US) practitioner agenda which has impelled (again primarily US) academics to carry out the kind of research critiqued during the course of the chapter, in order to meet these corporate needs. It is thereby postulated that, with reference to IMR at least, whatever elements of difference are found to be 'valuable' in terms of research do not arise naturally, but are inextricably linked to personal and economic interest, identity and well-being. Section 2.7 brings the chapter to a close with a statement of the central aims and objectives to be pursued by the thesis based on the discursive analysis presented in this chapter.*

2.2 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to present the reader with a critical account of the way in which the notion of 'difference'<sup>1</sup> has been commonly conceptualised within the discipline of international management. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, international management comprises a number of distinct but inter-related areas of research. Table 2.2 provides an overview of these areas<sup>2</sup>. During the course of this chapter, each of these fields will be reviewed and critiqued in chronological order to reflect the sequence in which they emerged and to demonstrate how constructions of difference have developed concomitantly.

Table 2.2: A Chronology of International Management Research

Chronology	Research Area	Focus
1960s/1970s	Comparative Management: Culture-Free Thesis	Organisational Universalism
1970s/1980s	Institutionalist and Culturist Perspectives	Anti-organisational universalism
1980s/1990s	Cross-Cultural (also Cross-National) Management	Influence of national culture on organisational practice
late 1980s/1990s	Diversity Management	Managing multiple identities in the workplace

Source: *Compiled by the author.*

In providing a critical account<sup>3</sup> of notions of difference, this chapter works with the concept of discourse<sup>4</sup> (Foucault, 1977, 1978) which can be loosely defined as a set of

<sup>1</sup> And by extension its verso 'identity'.  
<sup>2</sup> For purposes of presentation these fields have been labelled singularly. In practice they are neither distinct nor separate, but interlocking and continuous.  
<sup>3</sup> In presenting an account of any phenomenon, or taking a view on it, I am automatically implicated in a paradoxical relationship with my material. For, in an attempt to represent difference and diversity, my writing condemns its subtleties to the margins as I strive for a strong and coherent line of argument throughout the text. As such these footnotes become central in trying to do justice to the diversity of the research areas which I review. They become a way of preserving diversity.  
<sup>4</sup> Foucault uses the term discourse loosely. My understanding of his use of the term is to refer to a set of concepts, values and practices which define and justify a set of social relations, and which serve to objectify, through processes of identification and classification, particular phenomena such as sexuality, criminality, pathology etc. To give an illustration of this, in *The History of Sexuality* (1978), Foucault



concepts, values and practices that define and justify a set of social relations, and serve to objectify, through processes of identification and classification, empirical phenomena. In the case of international management research, it is my intention in this chapter to illuminate how its discursive orthodoxies of functionalism, normal science (Kuhn, 1962) and managerialism have served to objectify difference, in the manner suggested by Foucault, and to critique such objectification. I will suggest that these discourses have normalised a very particular understanding of difference, namely one which assumes it to be a brute social fact which exists externally to human beings and about which objective, value-free and strategically useful knowledge can be gained through scientific measurement.

In order to situate these lines of argument, the first section of this chapter provides the reader with an overview of the nature and state of current international management research. In particular, section 2.3 traces the development of the nascent field of IMR, highlights its main topics of inquiry and identifies therein the pivotal role of difference.

### **2.3 An Overview of International Management Research**

Relative to its key formative influence of international economics (Usunier, 1998) and its recent, more marginal concern for the disciplinary insights of anthropology (Chapman, 1997) and social theory (Jack and Lorbiecki, 1999), international management research is a new field of academic inquiry. This is not to imply that there is anything recent about the practice of international business<sup>5</sup>, merely that the concerted

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argues that the foremost discourse (or definition) of deviant sexual behaviour came from medicine. Because of its authority as a science, it was valued above all other discourses on account of its 'objectivity' and 'truth'. In this way, it can be argued that the history of sexuality is the history of what various discourses have said about sex. Sexualities thus have no reality other than that they are cited within a particular discourse. Similarly, in relation to this study's concern with difference, the 'history' of difference in international management research is in itself a history of what the predominant discourses of functionalism, normal science and managerialism have let be said about it.

<sup>5</sup> The most prolific early period of cross-border trade being that of the Roman Empire, reflecting the increasing military and political influence of the Republic. Similarly, European imperial mercantilism

study of trade, management and organisation across a variety of ‘international’ and ‘intercultural’ thresholds is predominantly an academic artefact of the last thirty years or so. It should be pointed out at this initial stage of the chapter, given its importance for later arguments, that the marked terms ‘international’ and ‘intercultural’ contained within the previous sentence have largely, although not exclusively, been regarded as interchangeable terms in IMR. This chapter will suggest that such semantic indifference represents a problematic issue for the discipline that requires some critical scrutiny. Having flagged this important point and underlined the relative immaturity of IMR as a discipline, I now move to introduce the reader to the broad contours of international management research with a view to underlining the centrality of the construct of difference to the field.

Numerous review articles exist which have documented the 'state-of-the-art' of IMR at various points in its disciplinary emergence over the last thirty years. The early to mid 1980s, for example, witnessed the publication of a spate of consecutive articles attempting to map out the field (see, for example, Child, 1981; Adler, 1983; Negandhi, 1983; Adler, 1984; Adler *et. al.*, 1986; Roberts and Boyacigiller, 1984), a phenomenon which was repeated a decade later (Beaty and Mendenhall, 1990; Boyacigiller and Adler, 1991; Triandis, 1992; Redding, 1994) and culminated in the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition of the US-based *Journal of International Business* (JIBS, 1994), the main dedicated outlet for IMR publications<sup>6</sup>. The leading article in this special edition by

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represented a further intensification of the exchange of goods and services across borders in consonance with the growth of European colonialism.

<sup>6</sup> The 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary edition of the *Journal of International Business Studies* contained several articles which reviewed different aspects of IMR over the 25-year period. Their conclusions were based on an examination of the articles published in the journal. JIBS is the best indicator of the state of art of IMR in so far as it has consistently been the main journal in the field for over 25 years and is the official journal of the *Academy of International Business*, the international academic association for IMR researchers. It has a worldwide readership and sees itself as the core publication in the area. Although other publications have emerged in the field, such as *International Studies of Management & Organization*, JIBS gives a more representative overview of what is being researched, where, how and when. Furthermore, as



Wright and Ricks (1994: 687-701) charted the progress of the field since the publication of the first major survey of international business research by Nehrt, Truitt and Wright in 1968. The authors of the original survey concluded that research into international business was embryonic and largely confined to specific management functions, principally marketing. Despite the paucity of IMR highlighted by the 1968 survey, the authors did point to nascent research interests in international dimensions of other functional areas such as finance, human resource management and strategic management. In their 1994 survey, Wright and Ricks confirmed the significant development of these budding functional interests and suggested that the field of IMR had subsequently acquired a new 'breadth and diversity', pointing as evidence of this to a plethora of new areas of inquiry<sup>7</sup>.

The emphasis on the international dimensions of 'core' management disciplines as identified by Wright and Ricks is evidence of a significant change in the types of question being posed by international management researchers. As Usunier (1998) argues, much of the early focus of IMR asked the question of *why* firms internationalise. Such questions spawned research into *inter alia* the internationalisation of companies and the attendant logic for export or foreign direct investment activity for example. This early IMR was largely modelled on perspectives from international economics, particularly those of international trade and investment theory. With a growing knowledge of why firms internationalise, however, a subsequent research interest developed into the question of *how* firms should deal with the more 'practical' issues of internationalisation focusing on tactics rather than strategies, functions rather than

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Usunier (1998) points out, it covers all topics of IMR, regardless of their functional focus. It is for these reasons that I rely on review articles from JIBS to present some of my overview.

<sup>7</sup> Including comparative management, cross-cultural management, comparative organisational studies, cross-national consumer behaviour, comparative accounting systems and practices, studies of multinational organisations, parent-subsidiary relationships and single country business studies.

operations, implementation rather than decision-oriented issues (Usunier, 1998: 3).

Table 2.3.1 illustrates the diversity of research topics spawned by such 'how' questions.

**Table 2.3.1: The Breadth and Diversity of IMR**

Key Research Areas in International Business
Personnel: Assignment, Training and Problems with the Multinational Firm Cross-Cultural Factors Affecting the Character and Supply of Management Personnel Intercultural Conflict Resolution International Transfer of Technology Role of International Business in Economic Development Effect of International Business on the Capital-exporting Country Comparative Cost Factors Nationalism and the Multinational Firm Legal Aspects of International Business International Marketing Management International Financial Management and Accounting Joint Venture Management Organization of Multinational Firms Policy: Multinational Corporate Goals and Strategies Multinational Firms: Trends in Growth and Form Information Transfer in International Business

**Source:** *Adapted from Wright and Ricks, 1994: 692-695.*

Such new 'breadth and diversity' has not, however, translated itself into cross-disciplinary research projects: the lion's share of research in international business has remained a matter of the extension of core disciplines into the international arena (Buckley and Chapman, 1996), albeit at greater levels of specialisation. Indeed, Usunier (1998) has noted the development of functional specialisms as evidence of this, including standardisation/customisation and country-of-origin effects research in marketing, the study of countertrade in finance and accounting standardisation in accountancy. As a consequence, little cross-fertilisation between 'international' subjects has occurred in spite of repeated calls for greater degrees of interdisciplinarity in IMR (Casson, 1988; Dunning, 1989; Buckley and Chapman, 1996) with the result that research in the field retains a clearly demarcated functional focus.



Although there is then evidence that IMR agendas have developed substantially within core disciplines, Wright and Ricks's celebratory rhetoric of the 'coming' of IMR should not be regarded as an indication that it is now a thriving research track comprising voluminous studies and publications. Several articles (see, principally, Redding, 1994; Tayeb, 1996; Usunier, 1998) lament the paucity of literature on areas of international and cross-cultural management. Adler's (1983) frequently cited review of 24 management journals in organisational behaviour (OB) between 1971 and 1980, for example, showed how little international research was actually being published. This review resulted in her now famous 'ostrich' accusation that whilst the internationalisation of business developed rapidly during the 1970s, cross-cultural management researchers had stuck their heads in the sand and avoided researching the key implications of this phenomenon. Citing subsequent reviews of publications in the field by Godkin *et. al.* (1989) and Peng *et. al.* (1991), Boyacigiller and Adler (1991) revisited the 'ostrich' accusation only to find that there had been no increase in the proportion of cross-cultural OB articles published during the 1980s and to the conclusion that American organisational science had metamorphosed from an ostrich into a 'parochial dinosaur'.

Adler's construction of IMR as parochial can be extended by considering the country of origin of international management research and the specific nations studied as part of it. In the former regard, Thomas *et. al.* (1994) demonstrated that the overwhelming majority (90.9%) of researchers considered in their survey of authors published in JIBS between 1970 and 1993 emanated from North America, principally the USA (see table 2.3.2). Although one must bear in mind the limitations inherent in the calculation of



such a figure<sup>8</sup>, several reasons would seem to suggest themselves in accounting for this figure. Usunier (1998), for example, argues that the dominant role played by American institutions in IMR reflects the more general predominance of US universities in management research, the relative lack of international orientation in other university research systems, and the language problems encountered by researchers from non-English speaking countries when publishing their research in English.

**Table 2.3.2: The Parochial Nature of IMR<sup>9</sup>**

<b>JIBS Articles by Continent</b>	<b>% (1970-1993)</b>
North America	90.9
Europe	11.5
Asia	5.6
South America	1.0
Oceania	0.7
Africa	0.3
<b>Frequency of Countries Studied</b>	<b>% (1970-1993)</b>
USA	42.9
Japan	15.4
United Kingdom	14.0
West Germany	11.0
Canada	10.1
France	9.3
Netherlands	6.6
Switzerland	6.0
Sweden	5.8
Mexico	5.5

**Source:** Adapted from Thomas *et. al.*, 1994: 678-682.

However if we consider the wider economic and technological contexts in which management research in general has developed over the past 30 years, then it might be

<sup>8</sup> Namely that the origin of the author refers to his/her academic institution rather than personal country of origin.

<sup>9</sup> As cited underneath this table, this information has been adapted from the Thomas *et. al.* article (1994) which provides a survey of the country coverage of the near 25 years' worth of JIBS publications. The table contained in the body of the text shows both the country of origin of the articles as well as the country foci of these articles as a percentage of the total number contained with the volumes published between 1970 and 1993.

suggested that this situation is closely related to the emergence of the United States as a global economic force and its home-grown multinationals as powerful economic actors. Commenting upon the increasing diversity of IMR, Wright and Ricks (1994: 689), for example, suggest that it indicates:

(...) a logical progression of research following the needs of practitioners, as international business management concerns were evolving from an earlier focus on export marketing to a new emphasis on foreign direct investment, requiring more understanding of the complexities of international finance and personnel management.

Much international management research could therefore be said to reflect the needs and corporate incentives of US multinationals searching for implementable solutions to business problems encountered by them in foreign marketplaces in which they have become increasingly enmeshed. This would certainly seem to be suggested by the predominance of the USA both as a focus of study and as the academic home of most international business research as illustrated above in table 2.3.2.

We can draw two important points from this suggestion. Firstly what would seem more interesting about table 2.3.2 is not so much the fact that it is the USA which is a privileged area of research, but that it is the *nation-state* as a geographical and political unit of organisation which is used to conceptualise the study of international business and management<sup>10</sup>. This is significant on the one hand because it illuminates the conditions for a central assumption of IMR that nation-states can be conflated with national culture, thus leading to the perceptibly comfortable interchangeability of the terms ‘international’ and ‘intercultural’ highlighted earlier. On the other, its significance lies in the potential for researchers, by responding to this corporate agenda, to identify themselves vicariously with ‘their’ nation-state and the wider rubric of enhancing national competitiveness in the international marketplace. It might therefore

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<sup>10</sup> This is particularly interesting given the difficulties of using the nation-state as a valid unit of political



be suggested that personal academic interest is closely entwined with wider corporate and national economic interests. This theme of 'corporate driven' academic interest, and the subsequent link between academic self-interest and national self-interest will recur throughout the remainder of the chapter. In coming to the end of this initial section then, it might be suggested that as a nascent field of inquiry, international management research has largely been framed by American corporate academic interests and has emerged through rigid functional<sup>11</sup> areas of research.

In specific relation to the present study however, it is a field which has largely developed on one fundamental premise alluded to by Wright and Ricks (1994) when they referred to the importance of 'understanding the complexities' (689) of international management and organisation. The assumption made by IMR theorists would seem to be that managing and organising internationally or interculturally is not only more difficult than managing and organising domestically and monoculturally, but also *qualitatively and inevitably different*. Such a concern with 'difference' is contained within the very titles of the new lines of inquiry identified in the 1994 JIBS survey ('comparative' management, 'cross-cultural' management or 'cross-national' consumer behaviour) implying as they do the existence of two separate entities (national/cultural marketing practices, managerial behaviours, financial systems etc.) for comparison or 'crossing'. Each of these areas of inquiry therefore provides specific instantiations and constructions of difference. As such, difference is a construct which transcends the functional boundaries of IMR, thereby providing a conceptual basis for responding to the challenge set out by previous researchers such as Dunning (1989) and Buckley and

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organisation in light of contemporary developments in global politics such as the rise of nationalism, cultural fragmentation and the increasing assertion of ethnic minority rights.

<sup>11</sup> It must be noted that this is just one interpretation of the current state of IMR. This is an obviously partial account which renders subservient research emanating from other disciplinary and non-US perspectives. However it is clear from an examination of a variety of sources that IMR retains clearly functional boundaries and has been driven by a US agenda.



Chapman (1996) to promote interdisciplinarity within international management research. By studying the construct of difference, this thesis aims to foster interdisciplinarity within IMR and thereby contribute to the development of the currently narrowly focused field portrayed in this section.

Having now provided an overview of the development of IMR, the remainder of the chapter reviews and critiques its key constituent fields. To this end, the following sections set out to illuminate the ways in which IMR's discursive orthodoxies of functionalism, normal science and managerialism have served to structure and subsequently normalise particular understandings of IMR's key construct of difference. As Alvesson and Willmott (1996) point out, it is the particular concepts and values contained within these discourses which have dominated the development of modern Western societies and attendant forms of social and cultural organisation, of which international management research is part. The following section 2.4 begins this discursive analysis with reference to the generic area of comparative management studies, the earliest form of international management research, demonstrating in particular the influence of normal science in its approach to the study of difference.

## **2.4 Comparative Management Studies: Bastion of Normal Science**

Since the 1970s, interest in comparative management has increased largely as a result of the failure of international economic theory to explain not only divergences in the economic performances of certain nations, but also the differences in their industrial and organisational forms and practices (Wilkinson, 1996). As a research track, comparative management studies has embraced a number of perspectives on the nature of difference in management and organisation between nation-states<sup>12</sup>. One of the early debates to

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<sup>12</sup> The organising unit for this area of research was initially the nation, and not national culture. Interest in national culture did not emerge until the comparative management studies of the late 1970s under the culturist perspective. Under this latter rubric, nation-states were assumed to possess homogeneous

emerge in comparative management's attempt to fill the theoretical lacuna left by international economics emanated from the area of organisational sociology. This debate centred around the question of the extent to which national cultures required different forms of organisation i.e. it asked the question of whether organisations should be regarded as 'culture-bound' or 'culture-free' entities (Hall and Xu, 1990). In addressing this question, the Aston School provided the main impetus in the early development of IMR by proposing that organisations were universal phenomena which transcend cultures. In researching organisations as a universal phenomenon, the Aston School was seminal in developing a scientific approach to the study of international management and organisation. Section 2.4.1 demonstrates how the Aston School, and in particular its conception of difference, might be seen as a discursive creation of normal science founded on a more broadly articulated structural functionalist base, and provides some attendant criticisms.

#### **2.4.1 The Culture-Free-Thesis**

Hickson *et. al.* (1974), in a classic exposition of the culture-free thesis, proposed that there are certain imperatives which require organisations to take on particular configurations if they are to survive. As they grow in size, they will, for example, need to specialise activities, formalise procedures and decentralise control (Smith, 1992). Based on the assertion that these activities are common to all organisations, the Aston studies, as they became known, compared the degrees of formalisation, specialisation and centralisation in organisations from a variety of nations<sup>13</sup>. Differences in the degree to which organisations from these nations formalised, specialised and centralised themselves were related to their size, dependence on head organisation/stockholders and suppliers, and the technology used in manufacturing (Donaldson, 1996; Roberts and

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national cultures.



Grabowski, 1996) rather than the national cultures in which they were embedded. This concept of 'organisational universalism' has produced a wealth of subsequent research examining its fundamental claims, some of which has supported the culture-free thesis (see, for example, Lammers and Hickson, 1979; Hickson and McMillan, 1981; Donaldson, 1996) and put forward more detailed conceptualisations of these universals.

Although these developments are worthy of more detailed comment, what is more immediately pertinent for this project is the way in which the Aston studies emerged as a cohesive research paradigm in their own right (Clegg and Hardy, 1996). Blankenburg (1980) for example argued that the Aston agenda had become a paradigm of its own on account of its prescription of a collective model for the making of (social) scientific discoveries about organisations and in light of its institutionalisation by scholars, university departments and publications of the academy. It should be pointed out however that Aston's prescriptions were not based on a generic scientific paradigm. Rather, in extending Blankenburg's claim, it might be suggested that the Aston paradigm epitomised a particular kind of science, namely '*normal*' science in the Kuhnian (1962) sense, which can be signified as:

(...) the organised, progressive, everyday work of gathering evidence and testing hypotheses. It goes on within a framework of intellectual assumptions and established practices, which it takes for granted. (Hollis, 1994:84)

Indeed for Marsden and Townley (1996: 659-675), the Aston School represented the most comprehensive example of the development of normal organisational science in the 1970s, a science based on a very clear set of 'intellectual assumptions and established practices'. In this case, the Aston studies can be regarded as an instantiation of *structural functionalism* (Durkheim, 1952 [orig. 1897]; Radcliffe-Brown, 1952), a broad form of social theory which has provided the intellectual orthodoxy for the

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<sup>13</sup> Including those of Western Europe, USA, Canada, Japan, India, Poland, Egypt, Algeria, Jordan and



majority of social scientific disciplines in the post-war period (Giddens, 1987; Outhwaite, 1987) and certainly that of organisational theory for much of its existence (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996). We might say therefore that as a cohesive research paradigm, organisational universalism was created through the intertwining of two key discourses, that of Kuhnian normal science on the one hand and a more broadly articulated structural functionalism on the other. Having now identified these discursive precedents, the section moves on to explore the effects these theoretical imperatives have had on the way in which difference was conceptualised and subsequently studied by organisational universalists.

In order to explore these issues, we can refer to the seminal work of Pugh *et. al.* (1963). Published in *Administrative Science Quarterly*<sup>14</sup>, their work set out to provide 'a conceptual scheme for organizational analysis' (294) which might improve the measurement and in turn the efficiency of organisational structure and bureaucracy. We can identify the discursive effect of normal science and structural functionalism on the organisational universalism instantiated in Pugh *et. al.*'s work by illuminating how the authors proceeded with the work of organisational analysis and from this, identifying the key assumptions and practices which characterised their approach. In terms of the measurement of organisational structure, first of all, the Aston researchers began by distinguishing and thereupon isolating certain conceptually distinct elements of organisations (such as the specialisation and centralisation of activities mentioned earlier). These elements were subsequently translated into a set of dependent and independent variables which provided Pugh and his co-authors with a vehicle for the creation of a set of empirically testable hypotheses about organisations. Having created these variables and attendant sets of hypotheses, the authors were then able to set about

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Iran for example.

the task of measuring relationships between the various aspects of organisational structure and their contexts using a variety of statistical tests.

In proceeding in such a manner, Pugh and his colleagues make fundamental assumptions about the ontology of organisation, assumptions which are characteristic of structural functionalist thought. Underlying their work for instance is the belief that organisations are hard, empirical *things* capable of identification and measurement. They are regarded as social facts and ontologically objective entities, existing independently of human beings and prior to any form of social scientific theorisation. Such a demarcation of a reality called 'organisation' was a consequence of Aston's epistemological alignment with empiricism which meant that only publically verifiable and observable sensory data could provide the route to knowledge (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1991: 220). Organisations needed to be objective, tangible, hard facts before they could become visible, measurable and therefore valid sources of data for the production of a scientific knowledge of organisation.

The Aston paradigm was not just cast in the ontologically objectivist (Searle, 1995) terms of structural functionalism however. It also proceeded epistemologically through the established 'objective' practices of normal science contained within the scheme's positivist<sup>15</sup> methodology. These practices pertained to more than just the identification of variables, the testing of hypotheses and their translation into large-scale survey questions. Aston's positivist methodology was based *inter alia* on the theoretical neutrality and thus impartiality of both the language it used to observe and describe

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<sup>14</sup> An indication both of its importance and therefore potential influence, as well as its scientific pretensions.

<sup>15</sup> Positivism has many uses and meanings in philosophy and the social sciences (Hollis, 1994). In its broadest sense, it can be used to refer to any approach which applies scientific method to human affairs, conceived as belonging to a natural order open to objective inquiry (ibid). It can however have a more specific meaning as in the sense of the hardline empiricist positivism of the Vienna Circle's logical positivism (and logical atomism). As used in my text, it refers to the workings of positive science with its



aspects of organisation, as well as the physical practice of that observation and description<sup>16</sup>. Of central importance to the scientific practice of comparative management studies was the replicability of the Aston conceptual scheme. Given the universal nature of the conceptual elements it identified and its underlying belief in epistemological and methodological objectivity, the Aston scheme was applied as a predictor of the relationship between these elements and its various contingencies across a wide variety of national and sectoral contexts. As a consequence of this 'replicability', the Aston paradigm was well established as the theoretical orthodoxy in comparative management studies and organisation theory more generally<sup>17</sup> by the 1970s (Donaldson, 1996).

As Marsden and Townley (1996) point out, the 'scientification' inherent in this structural functionalist orthodoxy represented an important development in the way in which management researchers, including those doing IMR, were 'encouraged' to produce knowledge. They write (1996: 664):

During the late 1950s and 1960s, science became the adjudicator of the truth of knowledge and positivism became the adjudicator of science. The more scientific is knowledge, the truer it must be, the more true, the more practically useful it must be (...). Henceforth, organization studies was shaped as an applied science. Its particular positivist understanding of the practice of science became the organizing principle of research into organization.

Given its predominance then as 'the organizing principle of research into organization' in the 1970s in particular, it is difficult to underestimate the formative role which Aston's normal scientific paradigm<sup>18</sup> has played in the naturalisation of a particular

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empiricist bend for scientific knowledge based on hypotheses testing as the creator of truth.

<sup>16</sup> The separation of language and practice in these two sentences is artificial since language itself is a form of social practice (van Dijk, 1997). They are intended to indicate however the way in which both the language used in questionnaires as well as the practice of formatting and analysing these questionnaires, was believed to be objective and free of any sort of theoretical bias.

<sup>17</sup> This is not to suggest that competing perspectives did not exist, merely that the normal scientific paradigm had become a dominant form for carrying out research.

<sup>18</sup> Clegg and Hardy (1996) point to the emergence of organization studies as an 'applied' science in the 1950s through to the 1970s. This is worthy of some brief comment here in the footnotes, but is expanded on at greater length later in the chapter (see section 2.5). The significance of the word 'applied' lies in the



understanding and approach to the study of difference within early IMR. This understanding consists of three key elements that might be extracted from the discussions above. Firstly and most significantly, the Aston School conceived difference as an objective category of analysis. It reified difference into a brute social fact with an ontology of its own and gave it the capacity for value-free, scientific measurement by 'objective' researchers. In delineating and objectifying difference as a social fact in this way, Aston's normal scientific paradigm stripped the concept of its formation in human relationships and, by extension therefore, dislocated it from human consciousness or language, and thereby human culture. Aston had rendered difference an autonomous, self-producing and self-regulating phenomenon, a highly reductionist conception which serves to homogenise the potentially variegated forms that organisational difference might take. This latter assumption provided the basis, secondly, for the Aston School's assumption that organisational structure was the sole repository of difference. Rather than being a facet of the manager or organisational employee, difference was merely talked about in early IMR in terms of the relationship between a set of contextual contingencies and its impact on the structure of organisations. There was no room in this account for societal or cultural explanands such as divergent cultural values. Alternative vehicles of difference had been marginalised. Difference thus came to stand for the heterogeneous interdependencies of a set of conceptual elements of organisation and a group of equally factitious contingencies.

A third crucial element of the Aston School which served to 'normalise' particular understandings of difference came not from the intellectual assumptions and key

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fact that Aston's normal scientific narrative was closely entwined with that of managerialism. One of the key objectives of comparative management studies was and continues to be the improvement of the efficiency, bureaucracy and thus rationality of organisational structures. The more scientific the knowledge about organisations, the more practical it was deemed to be and the more it might therefore

conceptual elements exemplified above, but from its statistical practices of normal scientific analysis. In this regard, it is important to note that what statistics do is to marginalise so-called ‘outliers’ which are found, through rigorous testing, to fall on the wrong side on the normal distribution curve. Conventionally these outliers, which are themselves instantiations of difference, are not deemed valuable by normal scientists. In this way statistical testing acts as a normative influence on the construction of difference: it irons out irregularities. This aspect of normal science is criticised in more depth in section 2.4.4, but for present purposes should be seen as an integral part of Aston’s approach to organisational analysis.

Bringing this account of Aston’s culture-free thesis to a close, this section has demonstrated the influence and effect of the discourse of normal science on its conception of difference, the characteristics of which are contained in the previous paragraph. The key point about Aston’s normal scientific paradigm is that it has been the seminal influence in the development of a functionalist and positivist theoretical orthodoxy within subsequent international management research, an orthodoxy which still prevails in the most contemporary IMR. In the next sub-section I go on to examine the ways in which Aston’s discursive orthodoxy continued to normalise this particular understanding and approach to difference.

#### **2.4.2 Institutional and Culturist Perspectives on difference: widening the agenda**

Towards the end of the 1970s, strenuous arguments *against* the organisational universalism proposed by the Aston studies were being mooted. I begin this section not by delving straight into an outline of these arguments, but by considering the impetus for the conceptual change in IMR which these arguments implied. For what is interesting about this conceptual development of the culture-free thesis is that it would

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contribute to improved managerial and business performance in the longer term.



seem to display very strong links to the material context in which it emerged. In other words, critique of the Aston programme had an important practitioner and thus corporate background.

This practitioner context would appear to contain two important elements. Firstly the late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed the accelerating internationalisation of principally American corporations. Such internationalisation inevitably resulted in an increasing emphasis being placed by corporations on the challenges impelled by the practice rather than the logic of international business i.e. a generic move from 'strategy' to 'management and organisation'<sup>19</sup>. As corporations became more deeply enmeshed abroad, the everyday experience of managing and organising in overseas markets finally brought corporate America face to face with difference, not in terms of an abstracted organisational structure, but in the form of divergent societies and cultures to their own. Issues of culture and societal structure proved problematic as they attempted to establish effective organisational arrangements abroad.

However it was not just increasing levels of internationalisation which pushed difference up the (US) corporate agenda. The other key practitioner concern of the time which impelled the conceptual development of IMR related to the vicissitudes of the economic performances of key global economic actors during this period. International trade theory had failed to provide corporations with satisfactory explanations of their changing fortunes, a failure which meant that increased attention came to be paid to non-economic and in particular, sociocultural determinants of organisational effectiveness. This concern became most acute within the American context where both the economy overall and the competitiveness of several specific US corporations had

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<sup>19</sup> Corresponding to the shift of emphasis noted by Usunier (1998) from the 'why' questions of internationalisation to questions of how this process might best proceed.



been eroded in the early 1980s by the success of the Japanese. Graham (1981: 5) expressed it thus:

Despite our growing international trade, America is losing ground in the worldwide marketplace. Take, for example, our continuing trade deficit with Japan, which was again more than \$10 billion during 1980. This particular deficit is perhaps the most troublesome aspect of our trade problems, because it defies simple explanation and, seemingly, all attempts on our part to rectify it. Trade deficits with OPEC nations are more easily understood - a combination of our thirst for fuel and the lack of large markets for our manufactured goods in OPEC countries. Indeed, our recent reduction in fuel and imports brightens our overall trade picture considerably. But the problem with Japan persists (...) how can it be that, with our technological superiority and industrial "head-start," we cannot sell our products in the expansive Japanese domestic market?

Graham's ethnocentric and parochial description of the Japanese 'problem' in the light of US 'technological superiority' is indicative of the question which spawned corporate and by progression academic interest in alternative explications of cross-national comparison. What did the Japanese do differently (and why) that made them so successful in the international marketplace of the early 1980s?

Based on this outline of the economic context within which the critique of the Aston School emerged, one central point might be drawn. There would seem to be a very direct linkage between the 'interests' of corporations, notably American ones, and the 'interests' of international management researchers, once again notably American (at least by way of institutional home) ones. There is a noteworthy symmetry here between the changing fortunes of US corporations, and the changing agenda of international management research, one which suggests a deterministic relationship between corporate and academic agendas. This seems to provide further evidence of a link between personal academic interest and corporate interest on the one hand, a link rewarded both by corporations themselves in terms of research access and funding for example, and the wider 'scientific community' in terms of publications and kudos. On the other hand there is an extended link too between academic self-interest and national

economic interest, one encapsulated nicely by Graham's quote which displays his concern for national competitiveness and the position of the USA as a leading economic power. Moving on from this, I return to the first sentence of this sub-section and consider the nature of the developments in comparative management studies fuelled by the kinds of question raised by Graham.

Emerging from the practitioner concerns highlighted above was the notion that instead of the hegemony of organisational form and concomitant modes of operation presumed by the Aston School, 'there was a clear *distinctiveness* in the way similar societies solved similar problems and challenges' (Mueller, 1994: 407, emphasis added by the author). The two schools of related but differently accented thought which emerged in accounting for this 'distinctiveness' have been labelled as the culturist and the institutional perspective (Wilkinson, 1996), or 'societal effect' (Maurice, 1979), respectively. With reference to the 'institutionalist' school, a basic tenet here is that:

Societal differences in organizing and generating human resources, and the pursuit of different business strategies are reciprocally related. An economy and society becomes populated by specific institutionalized organizational and human resource forms and practices, because economic niches and business strategies are different, and vice versa. (Sorge, 1991: 163)

Versions of institutional difference have been labelled and incorporated into a variety of perspectives on the cross-national study of organisations, such as disparate 'National Business Systems' (Whitley, 1990, 1992a, 1992b, 1999; Foss, 1999), business cultures (Randelsome, 1990) and the neo-contingency framework (Sorge, 1991). They all however share a common concern to investigate and document how organisational structures/practices and societal/institutional arrangements are interrelated<sup>20</sup>. Difference is thereby seen to reside in variegated arrangements of 'hierarchy-market relations which become institutionalized' (Whitley, 1992a: 10). Importantly then it can be



contrasted to the Aston School in so far as it rationalises organisational structure, not as a universal phenomenon, but as one which is differentially patterned by societal forms and activities such as economic organization or industrial democracy. The culturist perspective, in contrast with the above institutional one, foregrounds the role of cultural codes, and more especially cultural values in explicating the ways in which organisational forms and practices across the globe diverge (this is dealt with in greater depth in sub-section 2.4.4, hence the brevity of exposition). The divergent explanations of difference instantiated by these two perspectives have been most notably exemplified in the growing literature on the ANICs<sup>21</sup> where both have vied for the academic upperhand in explaining the dramatic growth of these nations in the 1970s and 1980s (Casson and Lundan, 1999).

In applying institutional logic to the business structures of East Asia first of all, institutionalists have emphasised different pre-modern traditions and patterns of industrialisation in East Asian economies which explain their national organisational contours. In his review of this area, Wilkinson (1996) shows how institutionalist researchers have argued that the national particularities of Japanese firms for example enact a communitarian logic, Korean firms a patrimonial logic, and Taiwanese firms a patrilineal logic. Firms in these countries can therefore be seen as institutional instantiations of particular historical and political forms of thought. In this context it is important to realise however that this institutionalist perspective on the ANICs relies in great part on the culturist perspective as a source of contrast in delineating its focus. Specifically, the institutionalist emphasis on the historical and political conditions which have given rise to different patterns of business organisation in these societies

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<sup>20</sup> Mueller (1994) argues that the effects of globalisation and the diffusion of best practice are taking away some of the punch of the societal argument. He still thinks that the societal effect is important but not as dominant as previous estimates posited.

<sup>21</sup> Asian Newly Industrializing Countries



stands in contrast to the culturist explanation based on the foregrounding of Confucian cultural value codes. These cultural codes have emphasised the homogeneous influence of Confucian ethical values on business structures and functions in South East Asia. As Wilkinson (1996) points out, the institutionalist perspective serves to 'refine' the culturist insistence on the homogeneity of Confucianism by pointing to historically specific, and therefore societally differentiated, appropriations of capitalism. Institutional and culturist perspectives can therefore easily be interrelated as explanants of the formation of organisational structures.

These institutionalist and culturist accounts of organisational form and structure became increasingly popular during the 1970s as researchers sought a way of responding to the practitioner concerns highlighted earlier. What is perhaps more important about the emergence of these perspectives, however, is that they acted as a catalyst for research into aspects of management and organisation which had previously been sidelined by the Aston School's penchant for organisational structure. Evidence of the subsequent widening of the agenda of comparative management studies can be found in Roberts and Boyacigiller's (1984) review of cross-national research which identified increasing interest in a variety of new areas including managerial values and attitudes, environmental characteristics and leadership styles *inter alia*. Worthy of comment here is the change in emphasis of the perceived 'location' of difference away from organisational structures and towards the *humans* who worked within these structures.

However, although the substantive agenda of comparative management studies had begun to broaden out into a number of areas previously ignored, no concomitant widening of the area's theoretical agenda occurred at this time. Rather it can be suggested that the development of comparative research into alternative functional areas involved the wholesale, but unnoticed import of the intellectual assumptions of

functionalism and the established practices of normal science propagated by the Aston School. Why? One might speculate that a potential reason for this lies in the ways in which theoretical orthodoxies such as Aston's normalise and naturalise their ways of doing things such that they become accepted without question as the 'right' way to go about research. Does this mean that comparative researchers in the 1970s could not be bothered to conceive of other ways to look at organisations? Perhaps, but the discussion at the beginning of this paragraph suggested an alternative reason, namely that there was not only cultural capital to be gained in producing scientific knowledge of organisations, but potentially also corporate capital (e.g. research funding). The next two sub-sections 2.4.3 and 2.4.4 set out to illuminate this continuing influence of functionalism and normal science in international management research and expand upon the criticisms of the orthodoxy introduced in the previous sub-section. The first of these sub-sections reviews comparative Anglo-German studies, a choice of literature which clearly reflects the empirical context of this thesis with its focus on the interactions between managers from one British and one German company.

### **2.4.3 Anglo-German studies**

Comparative management studies involving Great Britain<sup>22</sup> and Germany, although relatively few compared to those involving the USA for example, have provided a stable and perceptibly cumulative body of knowledge in IMR within Europe (Glunk *et. al.*, 1997). The foci of study of researchers in this area has been varied and included *inter alia* comparative studies of management control practices (Horovitz, 1980), corporate goals and managerial objectives (Budde *et. al.*, 1982), the professional situation of middle management (Lawrence, 1980; Stewart *et. al.*, 1994), factory organisation (Sorge and Warner, 1986) and social constructions of trust in supplier relations (Lane, 1995).

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<sup>22</sup> The name Great Britain rather than the UK is used in all the studies consulted for this project, hence its



In addition to these focused and small sampled comparative studies, Anglo-German differences have also been researched as part of larger studies of national work contexts such as those by Haire *et. al.*, (1966), Hofstede (1980) and Laurent (1983). Of particular note in this area is Ebster-Grosz and Pugh's (1996) *Anglo-German Business Collaboration: Pitfalls and Potentials*, which provides the most comprehensive overview of Anglo-German comparative studies currently available in this area of IMR. It covers a large number of functional concerns ranging from marketing and collaborative forms, to parent-subsidary relationships and organisational behaviour. This latter area of Ebster-Grosz and Pugh's text provides the basis for the discussion in this sub-section in consonance, once again, with the empirical focus of this project on managerial interaction.

First a couple of notes. In their comparative account of organisational behaviour (OB) Ebster-Grosz and Pugh cover almost all of the studies cited at the beginning of this sub-section and I therefore consider their discussion of OB to be comprehensive in nature. A further point to highlight is that the authors approach their comparative account from a primarily (although not exclusively) neo-institutional perspective. This is typical of the field of Anglo-German comparative management which has tended to privilege institutionalist accounts of difference over, but not to the exclusion of, culturist ones. Moving on from these notes, I now provide an exposition of the functionalist legacy of the Aston School which has served to structure IMR's subsequent disciplinary 'ways of seeing', in this case instantiated in Ebster-Grosz and Pugh's account of differences between British and German organisational behaviour.

Ebster-Grosz and Pugh begin their chapter on OB by stating the following (122):

The whole infrastructure of Germany (...) has been considerably fashioned to suit the requirements of industry; for example, the banking system, the system of vocational education, and the new graduate's job opportunities are all well integrated. This institutional cohesion and support of the environment underpins German industrial success, which could not have occurred solely through effective management. The nature of the social environment in which a company operates has a major impact on the nature of its organizational behaviour. (...) The structured nature of environmental relationships typical for German industrial culture affects the style of management, the attitudes to work and the interpersonal relationships associated with work activities in Germany. Similarly, the liberal social environment of Britain, with its greater individualism and contractual nature of relationships, strongly affects British organizational behaviour.

Even in these initial lines of their account of comparative Anglo-German organisational behaviour, we can illuminate the intellectual assumptions and subsequently the scientific practices of functionalism and normal science. In demonstrating this, a simple linguistic analysis of the quotation firstly reveals that its subjects and objects are presented as clearly demarcated, discrete and homogenised phenomena: 'the infrastructure of Germany', 'the social environment', 'German industrial culture', 'British organizational behaviour'. Just like the 'organisational structures' which concerned the Aston School, these features of British and German organisational life become social facts with perceptibly objective ontologies by way of Ebster-Grosz and Pugh's writing.

Secondly these subjects and objects stand in a causal and deterministic relationship with one another, an interpretation which might be suggested upon examining the verbs and the active voices used to link them: 'the nature of the social environment (...) *has a major impact* on the nature of its organizational behaviour'; 'the structured nature of environmental relationships (...) *affects* the style of management' for example. Such verbs create a definite intransitivity on the part of the objects of these clauses, thus denying them the possibility of standing in a reciprocal and co-constructive relationship



with their subjects. In other words 'organizational behaviour' and 'style of management' become mere functions of their environment rather than partners in a symbiotic relationship.

Thirdly the influence of specifically functionalist thought can also be read into the references made to the way in which 'the whole infrastructure of Germany (...) has been considerably fashioned *to suit the requirements* of industry' or the imperative of 'this institutional *cohesion and support* of the environment' and even 'the structured nature of environmental relationship *typical for* German industrial culture'. These three assertions would seem to provide evidence of a sociology of regulation (Burrell and Morgan, 1979), one whose fundamental view on society is that its component parts work in ways which maintain and preserve its normative bases and which perpetuate its already established relationships. And it is these assumptions which provide the basis of the normal scientific study which they go on to present in the remainder of their chapter on organisational behaviour in British and German firms.

Bringing these three points together then, the above linguistic analysis illuminates the inherent functionalism contained within Ebster-Grosz and Pugh's work. It demonstrates that differences in organisational behaviour have come to assume an objectivist ontology, that they are structured deterministically by a similarly objectivist institutional environment, and that their identification serves to contribute to the maintenance of society's normative economic bases. All these points are characteristic of an objective and regulative sociology, against which several criticisms might be levelled. Some of these criticisms have already been flagged in this chapter and are contained at greater length in earlier papers I have written from the framework of this chapter (see, for example, Jack, 1997, 1998). The first of these relates to the way in which this functionalism renders empirical phenomena such as difference *a priori* constructs for

analysis which serve to reduce them to a set of discrete and static variables. Drawing such tight boundaries around difference ignores its potentially highly variegated nature and thus its complexity, by constructing homogeneous concepts which can be pinned down for subsequent purposes of scientific control and measurement.

A second and related point of critique is that such conceptualisations of difference are too prescriptive and deterministic. They assume a unidirectional relationship between institutional structures and organisational behaviour, one which ignores the possibility of voluntaristic appropriations of societal forms. This is evidence of a wider problem that results from the way in which this functionalist orthodoxy objectifies its empirical constructs and thereby dislocates them from the human relations in which they take form, a point highlighted earlier in this chapter. The result of this is a sidelining of social agency as a structuring force in processes of management and organisation through which managers are rendered passive receptacles of institutionally-desirable behaviours. Space for individuality, non-conformity, critique and ultimately change is thus suppressed by this paradigm. What this continuing functional orthodoxy does however afford itself through its objectification and homogenisation of difference, is a neat and tidy construct which it can subject to scientific testing. And this is precisely the basis which allowed Ebster-Grosz and Pugh to carry out their scientific study into comparative Anglo-German organisational behaviour. I now go on to illuminate the ways in which the discourse of normal science (functionalism's bedfellow) guided the way in which the authors set about the task of identifying their research problem and thereupon developing a methodological procedure.

They first of all delineated two distinct types of comparative study in Anglo-German organizational behaviour: 'qualitative research based on interviews from a limited sample in each country' versus 'studies of large numbers of national work contexts



which include Britain and Germany’ (123). Having set out this primary demarcation, they go on to summarise the findings of a number of representative studies from both areas and present these in tabular form. Both tables are organised under three headings (management style, work attitudes and interpersonal relationships), concepts which they believe are representative of key aspects of organisational behaviour. These concepts are adapted and presented below, with table 2.4 relating to the small-scale studies and table 2.5 the large-scale survey work.

**Table 2.4: Organizational behaviour in Britain and Germany as characterized by authors of specific Anglo-German comparisons**

Britain	Germany
<p><i>Management style</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individualistic financial approach without a common focus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collectivistic production approach providing a common focus</li> </ul>
<p><i>Work attitudes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpersonal relationships</li> <li>• Working hard is less fun</li> <li>• Higher sensitivity to wage differences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall task orientation justifies the use of authority</li> <li>• Working hard is more fun</li> <li>• Lower sensitivity to wage difference</li> </ul>
<p><i>Interpersonal relationships</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Less like a family’</li> <li>• Professional envy more likely</li> <li>• More status-conscious</li> <li>• Less forthright in personal criticism</li> <li>• Low trust and ‘calculating’</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘More like a family’</li> <li>• Professional envy less likely</li> <li>• Less status-conscious</li> <li>• More forthright in personal criticism</li> <li>• High trust and ‘integrity’</li> </ul>

**Source:** *Adapted from Ebster-Grosz and Pugh, 1996: 126.*

Having compared and contrasted the results contained in these tables, and indicated that they offer ‘very divergent conclusions’ (130), Ebster-Grosz and Pugh create three main hypotheses relating to the key areas of difference which they perceive to emanate from the studies reviewed. These are (130-131):

*1. Management style:*

*The management style in German firms is more highly institutionalized than in British companies.*

**Table 2.5: Organizational behaviour in Britain and Germany as characterized by authors of larger scale samples**

Britain	Germany
<i>Management style</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low institutionalization of work environment</li> <li>• Less centralized</li> <li>• Management resembling a ‘market place’</li> <li>• More novel problem solving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Danger of overinstitutionalization</li> <li>• More centralized</li> <li>• Management resembling a ‘well oiled machine’</li> <li>• More routine</li> </ul>
<i>Work attitudes</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower expressed job satisfaction due to higher expectations of job variety</li> <li>• Higher work ethic</li> <li>• Employees emphasizing obligations</li> <li>• Emphasis on ‘interesting work’</li> <li>• Lower sensitivity to wage difference</li> <li>• Lower personal dependence on superiors</li> <li>• Higher job mobility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher expressed job satisfaction due to lower expectations of job variety</li> <li>• Lower work ethic</li> <li>• Employees emphasizing rights</li> <li>• Emphasis on ‘good pay’</li> <li>• Higher sensitivity to wage differences</li> <li>• Greater personal dependence on superiors</li> <li>• Lower job mobility</li> </ul>
<i>Interpersonal relationships</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some degree of conflict present</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some degree of conflict present</li> </ul>

**Source:** *Adapted from Ebster-Grosz and Pugh, 1996: 129.*

2. *Work attitudes:*  
*This institutionalization is associated with a greater degree of commitment in work attitudes on the part of managers and employees in German than in British firms.*

3. *Interpersonal relationships:*  
*This institutionalization and commitment entails a lower degree of conflict, and is accompanied by greater harmony in interpersonal relationships at work.*

The work which Ebster-Grosz and Pugh do in order to get to these sanitised hypotheses is clearly the work of normal science as defined by Hollis (see sub-section 2.4.1). Rather than questioning the nature of the constructs with which previous studies were concerned (organisational behaviour and societal institutions), they take the latter to be facts about which no ontological questions need be asked and subsequently identify differences in the existent knowledges of these facts to which they aspire to add and/or modify. This can be seen to be taking place through a process of operationalisation



where the various contours of a concept are identified and conjectures about their nature thereupon hypothesised for confirmation or rejection. There is an assumption here that knowledge is something which is cumulative, based on the testing, verification and replication of previous studies in the field and aimed at coming closer to some kind of 'truth' about the nature of the issues under consideration. This is a clear Modernist pretension of the possibilities of 'science' to establish truth and thereby contribute to economic progress. We can further illuminate the workings of normal science in this text of Anglo-German comparative management by reflecting upon some of the language used by the authors to justify their methodology.

In evaluating the advantages of the different methodologies previously employed in Anglo-German studies, Ebster-Grosz and Pugh comment on the 'more objective data' of large-scale questionnaire surveys and the fact that 'compared to smaller and limited surveys the likelihood of a bias in the sample is reduced, whilst there is the ability to offer personal anonymity to the respondents' (129). They attempt to temper these claims however by indicating that the major problem of this methodology is that it does not offer 'flexibility': '(...) the questionnaire is standard and fixed in the preparatory stage of a survey' (ibid). In relation to this 'drawback' (ibid), interviews proffer a useful methodological rejoinder since (130):

*(...) an interviewer can bring forward additional points of interest as they arise during data collection. New characterizations can be spotted and developed by experienced interviewers in conversation with the interviewees. So the interview method is a more appropriate tool for exploratory surveys involving less well-defined or more novel areas of study.*

Taking the advantages and disadvantages of questionnaires and interviews into account, Ebster-Grosz and Pugh attempt to combine both methods in their own study by firstly using the interview method on a large scale sample (n=99) and secondly incorporating flexibility into their questionnaire in terms of the phrasing and execution of their

questions. This was a clear attempt to circumvent the potential problems of each individual method which, presumably when combined, would serve to provide a more accurate, thus more scientific and ultimately more 'true' account of Anglo-German difference. Again we have tacit evidence of the belief in cumulative knowledge, in this instance achievable through the refinement and triangulation of previously used methodologies in the field. Furthermore Ebster-Grosz and Pugh's writing instantiates normal science's desired language of 'theoretical neutrality' through their reference, for example, to the 'objectivity' of data, the creation of an adequate sample size and the possibility of limiting bias. This is a clear indication of the way in which normal scientific research serves to drive a wedge between theory and method (Hollway, 1982, 1989), thus creating the conditions for researchers such as Ebster-Grosz and Pugh to assert that they can collect data objectively and independently of any theoretical perspective.

The aim of the discussion presented in this sub-section has been to demonstrate the way in which the intellectual assumptions of functionalism and the established practices of normal science propagated by the Aston School continued to normalise particular conceptions of difference within subsequent developments in IMR. Although I drew upon the application of institutionalist theory in Anglo-German comparative studies to illuminate this, this is not to say that the development of the culturist perspective was any different to this. In this regard, the following sub-section 2.4.4 looks for evidence of this orthodoxy in perhaps the most notable instantiation of the culturist perspective, namely the work of Geert Hofstede (1980). In contrast to this sub-section, however, it places specific focus on the use of statistics, a keystone of the normal scientific paradigm in IMR.



#### 2.4.4 Hofstede, statistics and the use of the questionnaire survey

It is difficult to overestimate the influence of Geert Hofstede on the way in which the study of culture within international management settings has been pursued. His contribution has been immense (Sondergaard, 1994; Chapman 1997.) Hofstede's best known work *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-related Values* published in 1980 was a landmark in the development of a more enduring concern in comparative culturist studies with the classification of national cultures by 'underlying values'. Such a focus on identifying underlying cultural values has accrued importance as a research area because of its purported ability to explain the nature of attitudes and behaviours in different national workplace contexts. Classifications of national cultures, also prominently substantiated in the works of Haire *et. al.* (1966)<sup>23</sup> and Ronen *et. al.* (1986)<sup>24</sup>, have been based upon surveys of work attitudes conducted in a variety of countries. This phenomenon provides us with an opportunity to critique the work of statistical testing in international management research. Hofstede's work was based on a questionnaire survey (88,000 responses) carried out in 66 subsidiaries of IBM throughout the world. From the average scores for each questionnaire item for each country, Hofstede conducted a factor analysis which yielded four so-called 'dimensions' along which all variations in work-related values between countries could be identified. These four dimensions are encapsulated in table 2.6 below.

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<sup>23</sup> In their seminal study in the area, Haire, Ghiselli and Porter (1966) surveyed 3641 managers in 14 countries on their work goals. Using semantic differential ratings, they identified five clusters of cultures whose managers gave similar responses to the survey's questions. They identified an Anglo group including the UK and the USA; a North European group including Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Germany; a Latin group (Spain, Italy, France and Belgium); Developing countries (India, Argentina and Chile); and Japan.

<sup>24</sup> In a similar fashion, Ronen (1986) integrated the findings of nine studies comparing work attitudes among nations which used different samples, measures of attitudes and a varying range of countries. Using smallest space analysis as the statistical tool, he identified eight clusters of 42 countries in total (Anglo, Nordic, Germanic, Latin European, Near Eastern, Arab, Far Eastern, Latin American) and four countries (India, Japan, Brazil, Israel) which did not fit into a cluster.

**Table 2.6: Hofstede's Dimensions**

- **Individualism versus collectivism:** the concern for the individual's own needs, goals and achievements as opposed to the social group's norms and benefits. This dimension purports to give an indication of the extent to which, in a given society<sup>25</sup>, individual identity is determined by individual choices as to how to act or by one's obligation to the groups or collective to which one belongs.
- **Power distance:** measures the concentration and distribution of authority, influence, power and equality within a culture. This dimension distinguishes countries where relations between superior and subordinate are close and informal, versus distant and formal and also pertains to the degree of hierarchy or level of participation in decisions. These first two dimensions of individualism-collectivism and power distance are closely related and, as Smith indicates (1992:40), much subsequent research in IMR has distinguished between those countries which are individualist and low on power distance from those which are collectivist and high on power distance.
- **Uncertainty avoidance:** relates to the extent to which a culture accepts ambiguity, risk or deviant behaviour. It thus pertains to the need for stability and conflict reduction and distinguishes national cultures which emphasise meticulous forward planning from those in which risk-taking and leaving things to chance are more prevalent.
- **Masculinity/femininity:** according to Hofstede, cultures can either exhibit more masculine values such as assertiveness, challenge and ambition or feminine ones such as caring, co-operation or security. This relates to a basic dichotomy between rational, aggressive, success driven task orientation, which is purported to be masculine in nature, and the emotional, affiliation, passive, relationship orientation, which is purported to be feminine.

**Source:** *Adapted from Hofstede, (1980).*

Just as was the case in relation to Ebster-Grosz and Pugh's instantiation of the institutional perspective, criticisms have been levelled against Hofstede on a number of levels. Most simplistic are the criticisms firstly that all Hofstede's data were collected from the one company and secondly that they are the product of a particular time and may have subsequently changed in definition since then (the data were gathered during the 1970s). From the point of view of the assumptions of positivist methodology, one could argue that the former criticism is something of a misnomer, even a positive aspect of Hofstede's research, since the focus on one organisation serves to eliminate any intervening variables emanating from different organisational or industrial contexts.

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<sup>25</sup> I use the term society consciously within this description since Hofstede fails to differentiate between states and cultures seemingly assuming that the one can be collapsed into the other.



In terms of the second point of critique it might be noted that all data are bounded in time and space, not just Hofstede's, and that this is an inevitable part of doing research. The problem is more fundamental than this and is explicitly related to the way in which difference comes to be represented in the work of Hofstede and others following a similar path of normal science.

Firstly, Hofstede's study serves to *conflate* nation states with national and unitary cultures (Germany is purported to have a 'German' culture, Great Britain a 'British' culture etc.), thus rendering invisible the multifaceted nature and numerous cultural differences which might be found within each of these societies. This fundamental premise of such questionnaire survey work can be seen as a technique of control, a practice of drawing tight boundaries around and subsequently homogenising sets of culturally diverse people such that they might be 'known'. Culture thus becomes a container of a socially factitious nature, a reified structure (just like the constructs of institutionalism accounted for earlier in this chapter) which masks out any other markers of difference e.g. gender, ethnicity, religion, sexuality etc. between national managers. Indeed, the very use of a questionnaire with its pre-defined categories for responses limits the individual's ability to construct themselves in any way they wish and thereby restricts the context of understanding and interpretation in which responses are given. It strips difference away from the contexts in which it is created, thus rendering it a mere objectified abstraction which becomes frozen in time, static and incapable either of change or critique.

Secondly the statistical processes involved in such large questionnaire surveys, rather than bringing to light the *a priori* existence of differences between national work values, actually act in ways which *create* or *force* such similarities and differences. In relation to the works of Haire *et. al.* (1966) and Ronen *et. al.* (1986), Griffeth and Hom (1987) for example point out that if these authors had used different statistical clustering methods in their studies, they would have yielded different groupings of countries. This suggests that statistical processes of normal science actually serve to construct cultural identities and differences rather than merely reflect them. This is a consequence of the way in which statistics are used to split empirical phenomena down before re-integrating them in a way which produces a 'group effect', creating specific similarities depending on the test used. Moreover, Hofstede's work is based on calculations of the mean points of all the completed questionnaires. These mean points serve to define the essence of what German or British organisational behaviour typically looks like by focusing attention on the average position, thus diverting attention away from the statistical 'outliers' and leading to the accusation that what are subsequently produced are nothing more than textual stereotypes. Hofstede ignores standard deviations which probably contain the most interesting information, certainly when the focus of one's study is that of difference. Any form of diversity, individuality, uniqueness, complexity contained within the boundaries placed by Hofstede is thus squeezed out. As Wendy Hollway (1989: 15) points out in relation to research of the Hofstedian type:

The concern for mass generalization and the requirement to use large numbers for statistical manipulation together produce knowledge which does not address the complex conditions of people and their conduct, either in their uniqueness or their commonality.

The third criticism in many ways re-iterates the point made earlier about the determinism inherent in institutional accounts of comparative Anglo-German organisational behaviour. While institutionalist accounts are more specific in



pinpointing an institutionalist environment as the cause of specific business structures/organisational behaviours etc., culturists see the latter as forms of value-driven behaviour derived from broader patterns of culture. Both these accounts are profoundly deterministic in nature and serve to sideline all forms of social agency in their explanations of the various contours of comparative organisational life. As Whittington (1992: 702- 434) argues:

(...) the diversity of social influences discovered by the institutionalists has still to be incorporated into a theory of management that allows for agency (...). The institutionalist account, then, replaces an economic determinism with a socio-cultural determinism: economic actors are 'passively embedded in', rather than 'actively engaged with', a social environment.

A fourth and final brief point of critique<sup>26</sup> is that both culturist and institutional explanations of organisation often ignore the role of *interests* in accounts of structure. As Wilkinson (1996) argues, it is often too easy to make simple connections between culture or institution and modern business practice, between pre-modern religion, political systems and kinship formations, and contemporary organisational relationships. Part of the reason for this, he explains, is that they can easily be used to legitimate elite preferences and perpetuate power relationships in and between organisations. As Wilkinson (1996: 442) amusingly surmises:

What could be more appealing to an employer than to be told his behaviour is a re-enactment of a great historical tradition? 'It's OK, he's Confucian!'; 'It's OK, his father was a slave-owner!'

The danger of this lies in allowing the legacy of history and culture to mask political interests and acts of linguistic, or perhaps more extremely, physical violence.

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<sup>26</sup> This point is expanded upon in section 2.5.

In summary of section 2.4 then, I have reviewed and critiqued the development of comparative management studies as an area of IMR steeped in the 'intellectual assumptions and established practices' (Hollis, 1984) of functionalism and normal science. In presenting this critique, it has been my particular concern to explore the way in which particular understandings of the key IMR concept of difference have been structured and subsequently normalised by these discourses. In outlining the culture-free thesis of the Aston School first of all, I argued that its primary focus, the organisation and its structure, had been reified into a social fact that existed independently of human consciousness and language. Ontologically, organisations purportedly possessed universal, objectivist structures that transcended all human, cultural and societal boundaries, thus reducing any notion of difference to a purely 'aesthetic' quality of organisational structure. Although increasing interest in institutionalist and culturist perspectives in the 1970s served to challenge such a-cultural and a-societal constructions of organisation, the assumptions and practices of functionalism and normal science continued to pervade the study of organisational structure and effectiveness.

Moreover it was highlighted that the insights of the institutionalist and culturist perspectives were being increasingly mobilised in areas other than organisational design, primarily organisational behaviour and human resource management. This marked a fundamental shift in the focus of IM researchers away from the structures within which managers worked to the nature of the managers themselves. As IMR began to widen its focus of attention, difference was re-routed into a study of the attitudes and work-related values primarily of managers. Through an exposition of the functionalist and normal scientific assumptions of two prominent studies in IMR in the second half of this section (Ebster-Grosz and Pugh (1996) representing the



institutionalist perspective and Hofstede (1980) the culturist), some of the key criticisms of the legacy of the Aston paradigm were presented. These included the ways in which the paradigm's imperative of statistical testing served: to conflate nation-states and culture; to create certain statistical similarities and differences between nation-states, whilst simultaneously masking others; to sideline social agency in international management relationships and finally to ignore the role of 'interests' in the study of organisation. The result of the twenty year development of such a type of comparative management studies has involved both the expansion as well as the reinforcement of a broadly functionalist, normal scientific and positivist theoretical orthodoxy within IMR, an orthodoxy which, although continually perpetuated, has not been without its critics.

To quote the inflammatory work of Redding (1994: 332):

The main body of work is clustered incompetently, unadventurously, but with comfortable conformity in the positivist micro-mini theory corner. The prototypical work here is the questionnaire survey and report. Outliers exist but in apparently unattractive territory. Understanding lies in moving upwards and outwards, but this requires a more sociological perspective and immediately raises questions about research legitimacy. As Sullivan (1992) has argued, the positivist paradigm of economics has been allowed to define the norms of the science and its reputational criteria. One might extend the argument to say that, in the process, it has turned many potentially effective scholars into narrow and unaware conformists, and caused at least thirty years' waste.

The overriding point to take away from this section, however, is the influence of the material context of international management on its subsequent theorisation by researchers. As alluded to earlier, this is a theme which runs throughout the chapter and points to the close correlation of primarily American practitioner corporate interests with those of academics. In this section, for example, I have argued that the two key developments in the early emergence of IMR, that of the Aston School and its reconfiguration in institutionalist and culturist theory, were impelled by preceding developments within the corporate and economic environment of international

management. ‘Waves’ of economic and corporate change seemed to result in ‘waves’ of new academic research interest.

Section 2.5 moves away from an exposition of the dominance of the functionalist and normal scientific discourses in IMR, to focus more specifically on the emergent privileging of IMR’s other key narrative of managerialism. Whereas the need for ‘good science’ was the dominating impetus in the development of IMR in the 1970s and early 1980s, subsequent developments in IMR during the 1980s and 1990s seem to have privileged the discourse of managerialism in their theorisation of difference<sup>27</sup>. I would suggest that this provides evidence of the increasing influence of corporate discourses on the ways in which international management researchers produce their knowledge, and more particularly the forms which this knowledge takes. In exploring the forms and effects of managerialism, the next section 2.5 focuses on the field of cross-cultural management (C-CM). As a research track cross-cultural management emerged out of culturist concerns with the value-laden nature of international management and expanded in consonance with practitioner concerns about the implications of globalisation in the form of increased management interaction.

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<sup>27</sup> This is not of course to suggest that functionalism and normal science suddenly ‘disappeared’, merely that the discourse of managerialism became comparatively more explicit in IMR.



## 2.5 Cross-Cultural Management: Positing Managerialist Dichotomies

As mentioned above, the aim of this section is to explore and critique the influence of the discourse of managerialism on cross-cultural management research. As with the previous section, it will be argued that the privileging of this discourse has taken place against important changes in the corporate environment and that this background has paved the way for managerialist responses to difference. It will be shown that this response, while wishing to address the challenges of managerial interaction, has continued to deploy comparative constructs for theorising difference in the form of totalising binary oppositions of Self and Other. The section will critique the use of such binary concepts and point out that they have become a necessary theoretical prerequisite for a managerialist approach to difference. The emerging dominance of the managerialist narrative in IMR has resulted in an increasing body of work which offers various stakeholder groups prescriptive frameworks for managerial action, as well as sets of knowledge and skills-based competencies which can be measured and attained through carefully designed training courses *inter alia*. In sub-section 2.5.2, I go on to label and discuss this emergent disciplinary force as a ‘cross-cultural training industry’ that reduces cultural difference to a strategic commodity which, like any other corporate resource, can be managed for the benefit of the organisation. Difference is thus no longer seen as a potential corporate liability caused by globalisation, but a manage-able phenomenon.

In order to situate these arguments, two distinct types of cross-cultural management research are delineated and covered in this section: *cross-national* management and *intranational* management (more commonly known as diversity management). Tung (1995: 482) articulates the difference between the two in the following way:

Managing cross-national diversity refers to managing the interface between peoples of two countries, such as that between expatriates and host-country

nationals. Managing intranational diversity, on the other hand refers to coping with the realities of an increasingly diverse, both ethnic- and gender-wise, workforce in a given country.

Both these areas of study privilege national culture as the key resource in accounting for difference. Where they diverge however is in the use of the boundaries of the nation-state: cross-national diversity quite clearly sets out to theorise difference in interactions which transcend national boundaries, intranational by contrast on interactions between culturally diverse groups working within a specific national boundary. Such concerns for culture have emerged through a number of differently accented but interrelated literatures which frequently encapsulate both the elements of cross-cultural management described by Tung. These include studies of international joint ventures (see, for example, Child, 1990; Selwyn, 1991; Swierczek and Hirsch, 1994), foreign parent-local subsidiary relationships (Tayeb, 1994), multicultural workforce management (Tayeb, 1996) and cross-cultural group and teamwork (Smith and Berg, 1997) for example. Of these areas, a cursory examination of the most recent (last five years) editions of key management journals e.g. ASQ, AMR, AMJ, BJM as well as JIBS and the *International Business Review* suggest that the study of cultural difference in international joint ventures (IJVs) and in cross-cultural group and teamwork has become a top concern for IM researchers. As such, the following sub-section 2.5.1 uses these literatures as a vehicle to explore the discursive influence of managerialism in C-CM.

### **2.5.1 Cross- and Intranational Management: IJVs and Cross-Cultural Teams**

As Tung suggests, the areas of cross-national and intranational management specifically involve the theoretisation of the ‘interface’ between managers from at least two ‘cultures’. As alluded to above, the perception that such an interface needs theorised at all by IM researchers has largely been the product of a corporate agenda which set out to respond to the challenges presented by increasingly fast and complex changes in the



practitioner environment. In terms of the cross-national literature first of all, it was largely conceived against a corporate background which had witnessed the accelerating emergence of the global economy and the concomitant challenges of globalisation (Hirst and Thompson, 1994). Signified by such terms as the 'global marketplace' (Paliwoda, 1993) or the 'global village' (McCracken, 1988), the discourse of globalisation has presented the world and its people in increasingly interconnected ways as a perceived consequence of developments in communications' technology, capital mobility and migration *inter alia*. The psychic proximity arising from the social, technological, economic and political interdependence of globalisation posed a serious challenge to corporations since it was perceived to undermine any practitioner assumption about the reality of stable, monocultural markets. In responding to these global challenges, the late 1980s and 1990s witnessed an increasing number of international joint ventures (IJVs), strategic alliances, mergers and acquisitions, manufacturing and turnkey agreements, and other strategic developments aimed at positioning corporations to serve their globalising markets. What is interesting about this material context of the cross-national management literature is the way in which it has been used by corporations in particular, and therefore many management academics in turn, to *problematise* the intercultural space as a difficult space and thus to justify an organisational scrutiny of difference. We can demonstrate this in relation to the burgeoning literature on international joint ventures.

Scholarship in the area of IJVs has frequently focused on the types of difficulties experienced by corporations in this area of strategy and ways in which these difficulties might be fruitfully managed. Selwyn (1991) for example noted that of the over 800 joint ventures and co-operative agreements between American firms and 'foreign' firms accounted for in his study, only 60% lasted for more than four years and 14% more than

ten. The author cited many possible reasons for this including the uneven control of the venture, contrasting emphases on short term rather than long term growth and little strategic planning which are all, he argues, rooted in cultural differences. In a similar vein, Child (1990) examined differences in the approaches of US and Japanese parents to managing their joint venture relationship with Chinese partners. He found that US-owned joint ventures tried more strongly to introduce US-based policies and practices into the Chinese subsidiary, resulting in substantial problems in the areas of communications, training and decision-making. Japanese parent companies, by contrast, attempted to discard their home-grown practices in favour of more centralized and autocratic systems of decision-making which were deemed more appropriate to the cultural setting. As Smith (1992: 45) indicates this might be seen to typify a Japanese willingness to adapt to whatever they judge to work best in local circumstances, a conclusion also reached by Tayeb (1994). In categorising the level of difficulty experienced by joint ventures emanating from other countries, Child found that Hong Kong-owned ventures in China experienced the least difficulties:

(...) partly at least because language problems and differences in cultural expectation would be at a minimum. The European-owned joint ventures were reported to be intermediate between the Japanese- and American-owned ventures, insofar as they frequently attempted to introduce Western procedures, but were more likely to compromise with Chinese expectations in situations where their attempts went astray. (Child, 1990: 45)

As alluded to earlier, what seems interesting about Child's study as a typical example of research into IJVs is the way he constructs the interorganisational spaces of joint ventures as *problematic intercultural spaces*. As I demonstrate shortly with regard to the intranational or diversity management literature, this is not just a feature of Child's work, however, but a keystone of cross-cultural management discourse. It represents a predominant conceptualisation of 'interculture' within C-CM as a problematic liminal<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The use of the word 'liminal' is conscious and emanates from the work of Victor Turner (1974) on



space in which the supposedly 'fixed' work-related values and attitudes (such as those constructed by Hofstede's study) of the indigenous manager (the Self) are re-routed (Clifford, 1997) through the different work-related attitudes and values of the foreign manager/ employee (the Other). This re-routing is problematic since the interactions of the Self and the Other undermine, question and often transform the knowledges which they have previously taken for granted about themselves and each other. As such, the discourse of cross-cultural management can be regarded as one based on *fear* as corporations are warned that if they do not understand the supposed rigid cultural distinctions between nations, particularly as they are questioned or transformed during cross-cultural interaction, business objectives will be jeopardised. Such is the conclusion of Child's study, a conclusion which perpetuates further scrutiny of difference in organisational contexts.

With regard to the literature on diversity management, the problematisation of the intercultural space, and the 'fear' of difference which it fuels, has been readily demonstrated in a previous paper by Lorbiecki and Jack (forthcoming 2000). In chronological terms, the debates surrounding this area of IMR emerged during the late 1980s and early 1990s, principally in the USA, and as such represent the most contemporary instantiation of organisational concerns with difference. Litvin (1997: 189) observed that this discourse has been quickly accepted as 'an important and powerful tool to harness the energies of all organizational members for service in the global battle for organizational success'. Like cross-national-management then, the context of globalisation also provides a backdrop for the emergence of the diversity management literature.

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ritual where he describes liminality as a transitory phase which is located in the space between borders.

As Lorbiecki and Jack (forthcoming 2000) argue, however, organisational justifications for examining difference or diversity within the workplace are more complex than Litvin's rhetorical clarion of globalisation might imply. In their paper, they identify key changes in the ways in which organisations justified their need to scrutinise difference. Initial interest in the area of diversity management was crucially sparked in the USA by the publication of the Hudson Institute's influential report *Workplace 2000* (Johnston and Packard, 1987) which informed North Americans that by the year 2000 the majority of their workers would be African-Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, women and other 'minority groups' (Beasley, 1996). According to Kandola and Fullerton (1998) this news startled many US business people and academics, particularly in the field of human resource management, causing them to take note of the changing *demographic* situation and to consider its effects. The flurry of statistics (Hammond and Kleiner, 1992) which followed was mobilised to rationalise the need to 'manage' this 'new found' diversity.

As this interest in changing workforce demographics gained momentum, it also gained an important *political* dimension. This new political interest in diversity management was established when its inclusivist<sup>29</sup> philosophy was seen as an attractive alternative to 'affirmative action' policies which were causing widespread unease in the US<sup>30</sup>. This political justification of scrutinising difference, rather than foregrounding similarity, soon turned *economic*, however, with the introduction of compelling arguments which warned firms – in articles such as *Diversify Now* (Scully, 1994), the *Bottom-Line Value of Diversity* (McNerney, 1994), *Diversify for Dollars* (Segal, 1997) and *Diversity: A*

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<sup>29</sup> Unlike affirmative action programmes which focused on enhancing the status of specific minority groups through positive discrimination, diversity initiatives covered a wider variety of social, cultural and ethnic groups, men and women of all ages and from all races, classes, occupations, religious groups and regardless of physical ability or sexual orientation

<sup>30</sup> The attractiveness of diversity management as a palatable alternative to affirmative action is echoed in the UK by Vince and Booth's (1996) study of diversity initiatives in local government.



*Bottom-Line Issue* (Owens, 1997) – that if they did not pay immediate attention to managing diversity their organisation’s performance or image would be put at risk. The data provided by statistics on demographic changes in the US and UK labour forces coupled with encouragement from both academics and practitioners (Rice, 1994; Kandola and Fullerton, 1994), who emphasised the link between diversity and organisational performance, persuaded organisations to pay hard attention to diversity management by turning it into a ‘*business*’ case. Table 2.7 summarises some of the main arguments identified primarily in the practitioner literature which makes a specifically business case out of diversity management.

**Table 2.7: Difference as a Business Case**

<p>Diversity management initiatives can serve to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve productivity (Gordon, 1992; D’Souza, 1997; Owens, 1997) and encourages more innovative solutions to problems (Rice, 1994) and thus profits (Segal, 1997).</li> <li>• Assist the understanding of a greater number of customer needs (Rice, 1994; Thibadoux <i>et. al.</i>, 1994; Capowski, 1996) thus increasing the customer base and turnover (Segal, 1997).</li> <li>• Enhance corporate competitiveness (McCune, 1996; Capowski, 1996) and continued survival (Miller, 1994).</li> <li>• Help lower the likelihood of litigation (Segal, 1997).</li> </ul>
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**Source:** *Lorbiecki and Jack, forthcoming 2000.*

The commercial rationale contained within these arguments highlights the seminal influence of corporate economic discourse on the study of organisational diversity. Crucially it points to the way in which initiatives can attend to questions of social justice and inclusion by linking them to improved company performance and thus endowing them with ‘commercial respectability’. According to Prasad and Mills (1997) it is

precisely such persuasive arguments which present diversity and difference as a legitimate area of management involvement and control (Lorbiecki, 1998) which have facilitated diversity management's entrance into mainstream management ideology.

Bringing together the above commentary on cross-cultural management's key literatures of cross-national and diversity management, it can be suggested that the material contexts in which they emerged have had a seminal influence on their development. As practitioners became increasingly engaged in intercultural encounters with 'foreign' partners on the one hand, and began to notice the heterogeneity of their domestic workforces on the other, corporate interest in knowledge which might help them 'manage' these phenomena became a priority. It was such a priority which can be seen to have induced the development of these research agendas. The reason why this commentary is important is because it clearly demonstrates the conditions which have brought about the privileging of managerialist discourse in the international management research of the late 1980s and 1990s. Difference has been signified in largely (but importantly not exclusively<sup>31</sup>) pejorative terms as a potential stumbling block in the achievement of international management objectives, with the consequence that those who are deemed to be different become stigmatised by their difference. Of course this raises important questions about what they are supposed to be different from, and what counts as difference in the first place, questions which are explored in greater depth with recourse to social theory in the next chapter. In short, however, turning both cross-national and diversity management into corporate economic concerns (business cases) has legitimised organisational scrutinies of employees' responses to difference, and suggested that there are ways of changing them if responses are deemed

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<sup>31</sup> In several texts, the key argumentative platform is that difference is an advantageous strategic resource rather than a potential stumbling block for organisations. See, for example, Dodds (1995). However, the vast majority of studies reviewed begin their texts by writing about difference as something which needs 'managed' in case it causes 'problems'.



‘inappropriate’. Conceiving foreignness as a liability (Zaheer, 1995) has paved the way for managerialist responses to difference.

Having outlined the conditions for the emergent privileging of the discourse of managerialism, I now move on to consider the particular forms which difference has taken in the literatures on IJVs and cross-cultural or transnational teams (Earley and Mosakowski, 2000). In short, a review of these areas suggests that although IM researchers have been primarily interested in theorising the interaction between culturally diverse organisational members, they still largely rely on the types of cultural dimensions and comparative constructs instantiated for example in the earlier approach of Hofstede (1980). As such they are liable to the same sorts of criticisms presented in previous sub-sections of this chapter. Importantly, however, the most recent literature on culturally diverse teams (notably Lau and Murnighan, 1998; Chatman *et. al.*, 1998; Pelled *et. al.*, 1999; Jehn *et. al.*, 1999; Earley and Mosakowski, 2000) would seem to mark a slight departure from this culturist orthodoxy. Although the dominant form which difference still takes is comparative in nature, and specifically the binary opposition, there is evidence of more explicit attempts within IMR to theorise the process through which these binaries might emerge. As I go on to show, this has largely involved the use of work from social psychology on group formation, most notably the work of Tajfel (1982) on social identity theory and Turner (1987) on self-categorization theory. Although this marks an attempt to theorise difference in a more sophisticated manner drawing upon ideas outwith management and organisation theory, this does *not* mean that it marks a significant theoretical departure from the exigencies of the predominant functionalist paradigm in IMR and the social sciences. Just as is the case with IMR, social psychology too is a discipline largely, although by no means

exclusively<sup>32</sup>, structured by the intellectual assumptions and scientific practices of functionalism.

As mentioned at the beginning of the previous paragraph, cross-cultural management research set itself the task of theorising interactions between culturally diverse managers. Rather than focusing on processual aspects of interaction however, many studies, particularly of cross-national IJVs, continue to rely on comparative constructs. For example in the work of Child (1990) mentioned earlier, such comparison is clearly indicated in his demarcation of the subjects and objects of his study: 'US and Japanese parents'; 'Chinese subsidiaries'; 'European-owned joint ventures'. These comparative constructs act as binary oppositions in the sense that they define themselves in relation to each other, and can as such be criticised along the same lines as Hofstede, namely for their homogenising tendencies, their conflation of geographical areas with discrete cultures and their reification of the concept of national culture. To demonstrate this at slightly greater length, I draw upon Swierczek and Hirsch's (1994) study of the (high) failure rate of European and North American joint ventures with Asian partners.

In their research, Swierczek and Hirst were concerned to construct a *multicultural management* framework which would facilitate the assessment of potential cultural problems in joint ventures before corporations engaged in them, based on the past experiences of the corporate sample. Swierczek and Hirst argued that the success of such ventures crucially depended on managers adopting a 'multicultural approach' which, they argued, entailed 'specific' and 'adaptive' behaviour which is sensitive to the cultural values of the venture partner. They express this multicultural challenge in the following way (205):

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<sup>32</sup> Not all social psychology is functionalist.



As the trends change to more global professional leadership for both Asian and Western multinationals, there will be a stronger requirement for (...) multicultural management skills. For successful joint ventures, international partners will need to understand how Asian management is changing.

The emphasis here is clearly on the international partners of Asian corporations to acquire the multicultural skills to be effective joint venture partners. In order to facilitate the acquisition of such a competency, Swierczek and Hirst present a set of comparisons between 'Asian' and 'Western' management practices, values, styles, organisations and actions. To illustrate briefly the dichotomous results to which this discourse leads, their 'Asian frame of reference' emphasised the contrast between Asian long-termism and Western short-termism, and between promotion based on performance in the West and promotion based on seniority and length of service in Asia. Such a framework of cultural binaries is a typical example of the reified catalogue (Salk, 1997) of assumptions, values and behaviours which characterise much of the cross-national literature and which serve to reduce the diversity and complexity of cultures that comprise the very large continent of Asia. They tend to essentialise both Asian and European managers, suggesting that their values and behaviours are fixed<sup>33</sup> and can therefore be taken for granted, thus ignoring the contextual processes and capacity for critique of social action. The work of Swierczek and Hirst is a very good example of the heady intersection of the discourses of functionalism and managerialism: by essentialising and objectifying difference, it then becomes ripe for managerialist appropriation, manipulation and intervention.

However, although these essentialising and reifying cultural constructs are still very much the orthodoxy in cross-cultural studies, there is some evidence as alluded to earlier which suggests that international management research is beginning to draw from the

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<sup>33</sup> Fixed also in a temporal sense. They are denied the capacity for change through their static rendering by the processes of objectification and reification.

insights of other disciplines in presenting forms of difference. Although the interdisciplinary theorisation of and methodological approach to the study of international management is not unknown<sup>34</sup>, recent literature on cross-cultural or international teamwork has provided a much needed foray into the perspectives of other social scientific disciplines. In the case of these latter corpi, this has involved the import of some important social psychological theory on group formation and group dynamics into IMR. Of particular note here is the influence of Tajfel's (1982) social identity theory and Turner's (1987) self-categorisation theory. Both these approaches to identity and difference rest on the assumption that individuals constitute group memberships when they deem themselves similar to others and then subsequently distinguish their 'in-groups' from other groups by underlining differences with outsiders and derogating out-group members. Tajfel and Turner's respective works are the key theoretical influences in the most contemporary research studies on difference in intercultural teams (see Chatman *et. al.*, 1998; Lau and Murnighan, 1998; Jehn *et. al.*, 1999; Pelled *et. al.*, 1999; Earley and Mosakowski, 2000).

In generic terms, what differentiates this emerging literature on culturally diverse or transnational teams from the closely related literature on IJVs is its more sophisticated attempt to theorise the construct of difference. Rather than tending to homogenise the construct, the studies reviewed above make explicit attempts to variegate the notion of difference and to explore its own differential qualities. In the particular case of Earley and Mosakowski (2000), for example, this took the form of a 'curvilinear' relationship where difference was conceived on a curved polarity between homogeneity and heterogeneity. In attempting to investigate difference in a more sensitive fashion than simply using crude binary constructs, such studies mark at least initial attempts in the

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<sup>34</sup> Notable exceptions or appropriations of the structural functionalist and positivist orthodoxy include the



IMR field to open up the ‘black-box’ of difference (Pelled *et. al.*, 1999). There are however two important similarities between these literatures. Firstly, because of its importation from the social psychology literature on group formation which is itself steeped in the assumptions of functionalism, the trend in the cross-cultural teams literature is open to some of the same criticisms as some of the IJV literature. Its attempts to measure ‘purposive’ actors’ various ‘motivations’ and ‘orientations’ towards working in transnational groups, and the differential ‘outcomes’ which this produces say in terms of attitudes and responses to ‘conflict management’, are all couched in the functionalist discourse of social psychology. A second point of similarity between these two related bodies of cross-cultural literature is that their theorisation is conducted for and framed by managerialist purposes. In all the articles reviewed for this sub-section, the papers begin with coverage of the imperatives of responding to the exigencies of global markets and heterogeneous workforces, and end by providing recommendations for managerialist interventions based on their findings. Typical of such a finale is Smith and Berg’s (1997) investigation of problems encountered by managers in the formation of cross-cultural groups. Having identified differences and thus difficulties of language and culture which manifested themselves as conflicts or opposing beliefs about the definition of constructive group members, leaders, and dynamics, they concluded (14):

The challenge for multinationals is to transform these contradictory beliefs and practices by searching for a framework that connects them.

Such calls are typical of the literature on IJVs as well as culturally diverse teams which explicitly endow their work with managerialist intentions and recommendations. As the next sub-section highlights, this concern for managerialism and translating research knowledge into material for managerial intervention has become highly institutionalised in recent years. As I go on to argue, such institutionalisation serves to render difference

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work of Brannen (1994) and Salk (1997).

a commodified strategic resource which, if managed according to the rules and guidelines of the emerging 'cross-cultural training industry', can afford the corporation significant benefits.

In closing this sub-section 2.4.1, I have demonstrated the influence and relative privileging of the discourse of managerialism in the key literatures of cross-cultural management. What I am not suggesting is that the functionalism and normal science of the Aston paradigm has somehow been eradicated. On the contrary, it is still the theoretical backbone for the study of difference, as all the articles reviewed in this sub-section demonstrate, even those on cross-cultural teams which substantiate more sophisticated approaches to difference. Instead, this would seem to constitute evidence of the continuing naturalisation of functionalism and normal science in the field of IMR, and the ever increasing and comparatively more explicit influence of corporate agendas on the study of cross-cultural management. In this regard, the previous paragraphs illuminated the conditions (notably the challenges of globalisation and increasingly heterogeneous workforces) which have allowed this discourse of managerialism to flourish within both the practice as well as the study of international management. These material conditions of IM have provided the justification for organisational scrutinies of difference, scrutinies which, as argued earlier by Lorbiecki (1998), have rendered difference a legitimate area for management intervention and control, and thus the focus for managerialist training and initiatives. As highlighted in the previous paragraphs, these initiatives have become institutionalised as part of a wider cultural training industry, one which is based on the premise that 'difference' is an ultimately manageable corporate resource. The next sub-section goes on to outline the nature of this institutionalised approach to difference.



### 2.5.2 The Cross-Cultural Training Industry

As suggested above, on account of the influence of managerialist discourse on the various literatures on cross-cultural management, the notion that difference could be managed had not only become a distinct possibility, but more importantly a desirable managerial competence for the corporations of the late 1980s and 1990s. Based on the belief that intercultural spaces were problematic spaces and that its troubling force of difference ought therefore to be 'feared', organisations became encouraged to review or modify their responses to difference. Much of this was propagated by HR consultants and corporate academics armed with guidelines and prescriptions which, while not ignoring the problems likely to be encountered by a scrutiny of difference, tended to reduce them to minor hurdles which could easily be overcome if the right steps were taken (Lorbiecki, 1998). In this sense, difference or diversity had become 'programmeable' as it could be incorporated into the routines and procedures of human resource management. 'In a word, diversity becomes *do-able*' (Prasad and Mills, 1997).

This latter belief in the 'do-ability' of difference has manifested itself in significant corporate investment in the search for the knowledge and skills which might allow organisations to become multiculturally proficient. As the following quotation from Tung (1995: 485) suitably demonstrates, conceptualising difference as a manageable resource allows it to be translated into the 'competency', 'skills-based' rhetoric of recent HRM:

There is an urgent need for (...) managers to develop a new repertoire of skills and abilities to manage and/or work with peoples whose cultures and value systems can be significantly different from those at home.

The desired development of such a 'repertoire of skills and abilities' has taken a variety of forms in terms of HRM activity, including: consultancy audits, reports and individual and group training courses; language training and the 'learn French in three weeks'

industry; sensitivity seminars, cross-cultural training manuals and videos; increased secondments overseas; and the appointment of internal HR specialists to deal with the human resource challenges of globalisation *inter alia*. In addition to this corporate investment, academics in a variety of management disciplines have (of course) also responded by devising prescriptive theories and models, and proffering cultural frameworks for effective cross-cultural interaction. This academic interest has emerged through various forms of literature including research into the selection and training of managers for overseas assignments (see, for example, Tung, 1981; Smith, 1992), intercultural communication training (Landis and Brislin, 1983; Black *et. al.*, 1991) and by promoting the notion of the effective global manager (Bhartlett and Ghoshal, 1989). In terms of the academic response to the exigencies of intranational management, for example, there exist numerous models and prescriptive guidelines for the effective management of diversity. The most notable of these include Kandola and Fullerton's (1998) diversity framework with the acronym MOSAIC<sup>35</sup>, Gardenswartz and Rowe's (1994) seven steps for 'capitalising' on diversity and Mamman's (1996) framework of 'diverse employee interaction strategies'<sup>36</sup>. UK universities have also joined the odyssey of 'internationalisation' (Raimond and Halliburton, 1995) by specifically targeting undergraduate and postgraduate markets overseas. UK universities are now competing with each other to recruit and mould the 'best' global graduates by arguing that they will provide them with the most advanced knowledge and skills on how to work with people of different cultures and languages.

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<sup>35</sup> MOSAIC: Mission and value; Objective and fair processes; Skilled workforce; Active flexibility; Individual focus; Culture that empowers.

<sup>36</sup> These are strategies based on a set of cultural, sociobiological and psychobiological variables which Mamman suggests diverse individuals within organisations might 'utilise' to interact successfully with other members of the organization. One key criticism of this emphasis on the diverse individual pursuing a responsive strategy is that they in turn become 'stigmatised' by their difference, a criticism made earlier in the text with regard to cross-cultural management.



Most frequently this search for ‘advanced’ intercultural skills and competencies has been substantiated through so-called ‘stage models’ that outline the various phases through which managers, and importantly their organisations, must pass in order to transform themselves from being ‘monoculturally blinkered’ to ‘multiculturally proficient’. Key examples here include Tung’s (1995) five-stage model of ‘communicative competence’<sup>37</sup> and Butler and Randell’s (1994) five-stage model for achieving ‘cultural fluency’<sup>38</sup>. At the heart of these models is a rational instrumentally defined problem-solving metaphor which runs along the lines of: ‘define the (cultural) problem’, collect alternative ‘solutions’ (consider the various cultural meanings attached to a situation); evaluate the alternatives (choose the most likely explanation for cultural difference) and implement the solution (encode a culturally sensitive response). On the one hand, these models make culture stand still such that it can be examined, a process which invariably involves the reduction of culture to a set of trite cognitive or behavioural elements. On the other hand it also posits the possibility of ‘perfect communication’, defined according to such models as the successful and problem-free encoding and decoding of managerial messages. The implicit Stimulus-Message-Recipient Model here has been substantially criticised (see, for example, Fiske, 1990) for its ignorance of the potential for contextually defined, actively appropriated and shifting interpretations of meaning by social actors, and thus for its overly simplistic conception of the communicative process. Despite these criticisms, their appeal and thus continued desirability for purposes of HRM training are clear: they connect into functionalist and managerialist discourses with their insistence on homogenised and

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<sup>37</sup> The five stages are unconscious incompetence; conscious incompetence; conscious competence; unconscious competence; unconscious supercompetence.

<sup>38</sup> The five stages progress as follows: acknowledge diversity; organise information according to stereotypes; ask questions to challenge the stereotypes; analyse communications’ episodes; generate other cultural messages.

objectivist constructs which can be manipulated for corporate benefit. These models are both creations as well as perpetual creators of such sanitised boxes of culture.

What is emerging from this contemporary landscape of IMR then is an increasingly institutionalised<sup>39</sup> corporate and academic response to the cultural exigencies of international and intercultural management. As shown above, this institutionalised response, which I labelled a cross-cultural training industry in a previous paper (with Lorbiecki, 1999), is underpinned by a common belief in the need and possibility of harnessing and managing the impact of cultural differences on the practice of international management. This cross-cultural training industry is now big business and consists of a network of corporations, private consultancies, government organisations, authors, business schools and academic publications which has propagated a practitioner-led agenda on difference with the promise of enhancing individual managerial and collective corporate performance at an international level. Taken together, this powerful network of interests exercises considerable power in making suggestions on how to do business with others who are deemed to be different from oneself. To be explicit, the concern which I have with the emergence of such an industry is the way in which it already appears to be acting as a disciplinary force of its own (à la Foucault), structuring and further perpetuating the problematic notions of difference outlined in this chapter. Difference has become a manageable commodity stripped of its human facets which, like any strategic resource can, and should be manipulated for corporate gain<sup>40</sup>. That such an institutionalised academic and corporate orthodoxy on difference is seen to be propagating itself at even greater pace and with little reflection or criticism of its assumptions is a worrying trend. It can only serve to

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<sup>39</sup> Institutionalised in the sense that this 'skills and competencies' discourse has become an important part of HRM rhetoric and practice, that it is finding increasing place in a variety of journals and conferences, and that it has provided enough justification for the mushrooming of intercultural training consultants.

<sup>40</sup> And to be sure, this corporate gain has mainly involved enhancing the corporation's 'bottom-line' as



reinforce the intellectual assumptions and established practices of IMR's dominant discourses that have rendered difference an unproblematically homogeneous, discrete and objective category of analysis. The recent emergence of such a cross-cultural training industry only serves to underline the need for increased interdisciplinary work of a critical kind in the field of IMR.

## **2.6 Difference as a Discursive Black Box**

In their influential book *Making Sense of Management*, Alvesson and Willmott (1996: 43) state that 'the development of modern Western societies has been dominated by two principal powers, capitalism and science'. As a creation and creator of such Western societies, management and organisation theory has been produced at the interface of these principal discourses of Western rationality. With this in mind, the purpose of this chapter has been to illuminate and critique the ways in which the key discourses of international management research, namely functionalism, normal science and managerialism, have intersected, structured and thus produced specific conceptualisations of difference<sup>41</sup>.

To summarise this chapter, following an overview of the field of IMR in section 2.3, section 2.4 focused specifically on the ways in which the discourse of normal science, combined with that of structural functionalism, had normalised a particular conception of difference within the early development of IMR. Using comparative management studies as its base, it demonstrated that although this body of literature involved a change in the location of difference away from Aston's emphasis on organisational structure towards the humans who occupied and created these structures, there was no concomitant change in the theorisation of difference. In fact, the comparative

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highlighted earlier in the chapter.

<sup>41</sup> I would like to re-iterate that this is only one reading of the development of international management research. Many others could be written. As such I feel it necessary to point out that this chapter is at best

management studies of the 1970s were dominated by the functionalist assumptions of the Aston paradigm which rendered difference a hard-edged and discrete social fact which was perceived to stand autonomously from humans and about which objective and value-free knowledge could be gained through scientific measurement. The effects of such a conception of difference were criticised with particular reference to Anglo-German comparative studies and the seminal work of Hofstede (1980) in sub-section 2.4.3 and 2.4.4 which were seen to be representative of the institutionalist and culturist appropriations of the Aston School.

Moving on from this, section 2.5 focused on the area of cross-cultural management, a field which grew out of the culturist perspective covered in the earlier comparative section and privileged the concept of national culture in explicating difference. Throughout this section it was my particular concern to illuminate the material conditions which led to the discursive privileging of managerialism in the international management research of the 1980s and 1990s. It showed how this discourse had emerged through a variety of literatures such as those of IJVs and cross-cultural teams, which had transformed difference into a 'manageable' corporate resource which could be manipulated for corporate gain. Difference has become part of the HRM 'skills and competencies' rhetoric which has served to reduce it to a homogenised and commodified form, stripped of its human potential for processual structuring, appropriation and contextual interpretation. Although there was some evidence in the cross-cultural literature of attempts to move away from the use of crude binary constructs to conceptualise cultural difference (notably through the use of social psychology literature), the functionalist orthodoxy of IMR based on generalised notions of the Self and the Other continues to prevail even in the most contemporary texts.

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a partial (in both senses of the word) rendering of IMR.



In short, this chapter has not so much offered a 'history' of difference in IMR, as a history of what its dominant discourses have let be said about it<sup>42</sup> and, to be sure, this would seem to be very little of a critical or an interdisciplinary nature. It would appear that difference, like so many concepts in the social sciences, has been rendered a kind of 'black-box', a phrase most notably associated with Bruno Latour who defines the notion as follows (1987: 2-3):

The word **black box** (emphasis in the original) is used by cyberneticians whenever a piece of machinery or a set of commands is too complex. In its place they draw a little box about which they need to know nothing but its input and output. As far as John Whittaker is concerned the double helix and the machine are two black boxes. That is, no matter how controversial their history, how complex their inner workings, only their input and output count.

For the most part, international management researchers have ignored the complexities and processual nature of difference as a human facet as highlighted by researchers from many other social scientific disciplines such as sociology or cultural studies (see, for example, Hall, 1990, 1996, 1997). In their stead, the orthodox approach to difference would appear to involve ignoring the constituent processes which are purported to lie inside the black-box of difference, and focusing on the identification and subsequent management of its inputs (cultural values, societal arrangements etc.) and outputs (culturally specific managerial behaviour, national institutional differences). That these inputs and outputs might mean different things to different people, take significance contextually or implicate the workings of power relations which serve to subjugate particular cultural groupings within organisations is not an issue for the sanitised and tightly defined boxes of the IMR orthodoxy. It is here that we should note the close connection between changes in the wider corporate environment and thus the needs of corporate America for manageable boxes of difference, and the chronological develop of IMR. As argued throughout the chapter, there seems to be a direct correlation between

corporate agendas responding to the growth of the international marketplace in the post-war period and the specific twists and turns of academic agendas. Such a correlation suggests that whatever elements of difference are found to be ‘valuable’ or ‘interesting’ in terms of research do not arise naturally, but are inextricably linked to the exigencies of corporate agendas. As alluded to earlier in the chapter, this convergence between academic and corporate interests leads me to believe that personal research agendas in IMR are inextricably linked to personal and economic gain, identity and well-being.

In order to study difference in a more theoretically and empirically sensitive fashion, we need, as Star (1991) entreats, to open up this ‘black-box’ and scrutinise the processes through which it comes to appear hard-edged and concrete to social actors. We can begin such a process of critical scrutiny by devising a set of aims and objectives which provide a thematic focus for the present research. These are presented in the following section 2.7.

## **2.7 Statement of Research Aim and Objectives**

Having now reviewed and critiqued conceptualisations of difference in international management research over its relatively short life-span as a discipline, this section sets out the key aim and objectives of the thesis. I regard these aims and objectives more as thematic foci which provide a vehicle for a critical investigation of chosen aspects of IMR’s approach to difference, rather than ‘testable hypotheses’ for establishing purportedly ‘objective truths’ about difference. They serve to delimit specific areas of the broad and complex area of international management research which merit investigation, and thus provide a more focused lens with which to approach the study of difference. These aims and objectives emanate from the critique presented in this chapter.

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<sup>42</sup> In consonance with the Foucauldian understanding of discourse outlined at the beginning of the chapter.



The central aim of this thesis is **to challenge the conventional wisdom of IMR by exploring the nature of identity and difference within an intercultural management setting.** This aim reflects several facets of this chapter's literature review which merit some comment. Firstly the inseparable constructs of identity and difference are the major empirical focus of contemporary IM researchers. Whereas the Aston School had focused on organisational structure as the repository of difference, the culturist perspective in particular was responsible for drawing attention to the humans who worked within these structures as a more pertinent repository of difference. This led to an increasing focus on managerial identities and differences. As such, this thesis investigates IMR's privileged empirical construct, but as the remainder of the project will show, from a different disciplinary angle and with more of a critical intent. The second element of this aim worthy of comment is the use of the adjective 'intercultural' when denoting the context for the investigation. As mentioned at several points throughout this chapter, IMR has conventionally used the terms international and intercultural interchangeably. The choice of intercultural reflects my wish to emphasise that my primary focus is on investigating the 'cultural' in this thesis, as instantiated by my first sub-objective. Finally in terms of the research aim, the verb 'explore' has been chosen to signify my intent to gain a more sophisticated understanding of the topic of identity and difference by investigating its contours in depth, rather than pinning down a meaning for it at the beginning of the research. Having commented on particular elements of my research aim, I now present the three sub-objectives which have been devised in order to mark more definite contours for this exploration.

The first sub-objective is **to examine the role of national culture in accounting for difference.** This concern emanates primarily from the cross-cultural management literature which has tended to privilege national culture as the key determinant of

difference. As identified in the earlier critique, there are several problems with this. For instance, is it not possible that managers might evoke signifiers other than national culture in representing difference, such as gender, age, occupational status, race or class? Perhaps managers will combine various markers in signifying difference. They might for instance represent difference at the intersection of discourses on gender and race. Furthermore, do they subscribe to the IMR assumption that national culture is a meaningful concept? Or that it corresponds to the boundaries of the nation-state and applies homogeneously to all those within those borders? Do managers define themselves in national cultural terms in some contexts and not in others? If so, what do these contexts look like? These are some of questions which might provoke interesting insights into the privileged signifier of national culture.

The second sub-objective is **to scrutinise the extent to which difference might be described as an objective category of analysis.** As a result of the functionalist and normal scientific discourses that have placed an iron collar around international management research, difference has come to be seen as an objective category of analysis. In other words, it is regarded as a brute social fact whose contours can be measured through scientific method. Theoretically this can be seen as a highly reductionist concept which ignores the role of social agency in constructions of difference, and the processual and contextual forms which this might take. Does difference shift? If so, what boundaries are used? What is the influence of context on the construction of difference? Is the construction of identity and difference a voluntaristic act? Or is it in some way structured? How does difference take form? The thesis sets out therefore to elicit empirical data which might be used to qualify such a reductionist conception of difference.



The final sub-objective to be addressed is **to explore the political nature of identity and difference**. This relates in particular to criticisms of the institutionalist and culturist perspective advanced, for instance, by Richard Whittington (1992). His particular concern is that both these schools of thought ignore the role of political interests in constructions of identity and difference. They implicitly assume that all identities and differences are equal. Yet, are some identities not more equal than others? For instance within managerial settings, are white middle-aged male identities not more powerful than young black female identities? How does such a situation come to be? What forms does a politics of difference take? Who is marginalised? Who is privileged? Is this contextually defined? Again, these are some questions which might help explore the political nature of identity and difference in an international management setting.

Having now outlined the research aim and objectives which form the basis for this thesis, the next chapter goes on to develop and justify an interdisciplinary conceptual framework for the subsequent study of difference. These concepts will primarily come from readings of specific areas of social and organisational theory, and cultural studies.

### RECONFIGURING DIFFERENCE: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

#### 3.1 Summary

*Based on the review of conventional conceptualisations of difference in IMR outlined in the previous chapter, the present chapter sets out to develop a non-functionalist, non-managerialist and interdisciplinary framework for studying difference within an intercultural management setting. Section 3.3 begins by giving a broad overview of contemporary developments in the area of social and organisational theory and then locates particular areas of critique which such a non-functionalist and non-managerialist conceptual framework should deal with. Based initially on the work of the cultural studies theorist Hall (1990), section 3.4 argues for and develops a processual account of identities and differences at the heart of which lies the work of the 'division' or the 'boundary' (Cooper, 1990). Drawing upon the broadly post-structuralist concept of the 'labour of division' (Munro, 1997; Parker, 1997), the section goes on to conceive identities and difference as acts of organisation and disorganisation. As such, whilst identities and differences might give the temporary impression of being fixed, they might rather be regarded as being continuously and actively reproduced by social actors through the deployment of a variety of different divisions and boundaries. Section 3.5 extends this concept of the labour of division by giving it a more explicit political dimension with recourse to the work of post-colonial writer Edward Said (1978). In moving the role of divisions in social action beyond the level of language to the level of discourse, Said's work on Orientalism provides a perspective for analysing the ways in which divisions work politically to simultaneously privilege some and marginalise other identities and differences within intercultural settings. This conceptual framework acts as the basis for the empirical study to be outlined in the next chapter.*

#### 3.2 Introduction

The previous chapter mapped out the ways in which the construct of difference has been conventionally conceptualised within the various literatures of international management research. Specifically the chapter illuminated how IMR's discursive orthodoxies of functionalism, normal science and managerialism had served to structure and subsequently normalise a particular understanding of difference, namely one which conceived it as an objective category of analysis. In contrast to this, the objective of this chapter is to develop and justify a conceptual framework for the study of difference which is *non-functionalist* and *non-managerialist* in nature. To do this, I draw upon ideas and insights from disciplines outwith the traditional confines of IMR. It is



intended that these interdisciplinary ideas endow the construct of difference with an alternative set of ontological and epistemological qualities that will enhance the potential of a more sophisticated and variegated reading of its emergence in intercultural management contexts. The following section 3.3 introduces the reader to the contemporary ideational contours of social and organisational theory, the first of two key disciplines drawn upon in this chapter.

### **3.3 The Contemporary Landscape of Social and Organisational Theory**

In constructing a conceptual framework for the study of identity and difference, this chapter draws upon contemporary ideas from two key disciplines, social and organisational theory on the one hand, and cultural studies on the other. In this initial section of the chapter, the focus is placed on giving a brief overview of the contours of contemporary social and organisational theory in order to familiarise the reader with its current status and thus contextualise my conceptual framework. I see this thesis as drawing on some of its contemporary ideas as a means of reconfiguring the field of international management research which, in stark contradiction to the broader area of social and organisational theory, has largely remained rooted in its functionalist and positivist orthodoxy.

Giddens (1987) offers a brief (given the possible scope of such a task), yet insightful overview of what he sees as the key trends in social theory since the mid- to late 1970s. One of these trends is the increasing similarity of the problems and inquiries of social science and philosophy. In this regard, Giddens posits that until the early 1970s, the social sciences had been dominated by the view that the objectives and logic of the social sciences were and should be the same as those of the natural sciences. Although this was not an uncontested theoretical hegemony (take, for example, the development of symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology with their respective emphases on

the distinctive qualities of human beings and their actions, compared to the objects of nature), the idea of natural science espoused by many proponents of the orthodox consensus:

(...) to which they tied aspirations of social science was not seen as a particular philosophical interpretation of natural science, but as an unquestioned picture of the essential character of the natural sciences. (Giddens, 1987: 54)

The field of biology in particular provided the model of scientific research which most profoundly influenced the social sciences. Primarily advocated under the rubric of functionalism, this model expounded the general notion that the mechanics of biological systems had close affinities with the operation of social systems. This and other modes of naturalistic research have been intensely scrutinised in the past twenty-five years with particular recourse to the discipline of philosophy. Fundamental questions about the nature of truth and reality (see, for example, Gadamer, 1975), the function of language (see, for example, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 1922) and symbolism (see, for example, Blumer, 1969) and the creation of knowledge (see, for example, Popper, 1963) *inter alia* have generated a significant interest in the possibilities of philosophical perspectives for developing a reconfigured form of human inquiry. In this light, Giddens (1987: 55) suggests that the acknowledged (naturalistic) terrain over which intellectual and conceptual battles had been fought, has come to be riddled with chasms across which advocates of different perspectives find it difficult to 'converse' with each other. In its place has appeared a plethora of often disparate and different kinds of social theory based variously on post-analytic philosophy, the later works of Wittgenstein, developments in French social theory, critical feminist and post-structuralist theory, postcolonialism, hermeneutics, deconstruction and ordinary language philosophy. One key result of this proliferation of different theoretical perspectives and thus intellectual bases for human inquiry has been the emergence of a 'reflexive' turn within the social sciences (Steier, 1991). In this respect, social scientists



have become increasingly concerned to inspect the ontological and epistemological assumptions they bring to bear about the phenomena of the social world, the wider social and cultural conditions within which they carry out research and the status they claim for their subsequent knowledges. Importantly however, this reflexive concern should not be seen as an inevitable part of the conceptual and theoretical development of the social sciences. Rather what it represents is a response to the purported 'crisis' (Outhwaite, 1987) in the human sciences over the last twenty or so years about its aims, logic and preferred methods. As such, pluralism within social theory can be seen as a product of a recent and concerted period of reflexive debate on the adequacy and legitimation of any truth claim about the human world, a phenomenon which accounts for social theory's foray into philosophy.

As a form of social science, the recent history of organisation studies<sup>42</sup> has also been characterised by an emergent diversity of theoretical perspectives as it too has responded to the legitimation crisis highlighted above. According to Calas and Smircich (1999), the entrance of theoretical pluralism into the field of organisation studies can be traced to various writings about the 'multiparadigmatic status of the field' (most notably, Burrell and Morgan, 1979) which appeared in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This multiparadigm approach to organisation studies provided evidence of the growing realisation that organisation and organisations could be approached from a number of different, perhaps even incommensurable, research perspectives which rested on different assumptions about the social world. Such paradigm work mirrored the generic call for 'reflexivity' in the social sciences towards the 'constitution of theory' (Calas and Smircich, 1999: 649) in so far as it impelled researchers to clarify their own ontological and epistemological positions on the study of organisations. During the

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<sup>42</sup> I am clearly drawing a distinction here between 'organization studies' as a specific discipline and the field of international management. Whereas the former has been largely sympathetic to interdisciplinary

mid- to late 1980s and early 1990s, this theoretical reflexivity in organisation studies was significantly influenced by increasing interest in postmodern perspectives on organisational analysis (Cooper and Burrell, 1988; Berg, 1989; Clegg, 1990; Parker, 1992; Kreiner, 1992; Alvesson, 1995; Chia, 1995; Alvesson and Deetz, 1995; Parker, 1995). Given the reported difficulties of 'defining' postmodernism (Parker 1992, Alvesson, 1995) and the sheer diversity of themes<sup>43</sup> and perspectives<sup>44</sup> contained within its very broad contours, it is fair to say that debates on postmodernism within organisation studies provided numerous avenues through which to critique conventional approaches to organisational theory development. Together they form what Parker (2000b: 26) calls 'an established narrative about the fragmentation of organization theory'.

There is some debate however as to the desirability of such a state of theoretical pluralism or theoretical fragmentation. In his text, Giddens (1987) for example asserts that this 'unconstrained' (57) theoretical pluralism, as he puts it, is indefensible since it encourages forms of theoretical relativism. He argues that criteria relevant for the evaluation of divergent truth claims must exist, otherwise social science would be dissolved. For Giddens, a diversity of perspective in social theory should not imply the abandonment of attempts to mediate and reconcile different viewpoints. But, in response to Giddens, who suggested that theoretical pluralism necessarily and inevitably leads to theoretical relativism? And why should theoretical pluralism necessarily always be a bad thing? What I detect in Giddens' assertion is a wider concern about

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perspectives, especially those emanating from social theory, the latter, as outlined in chapter two, remains firmly rooted within a functionalist paradigm.

<sup>43</sup> Including discussion on the existence of 'postmodern' organisations, organisational culture and symbolism, the ways in which organisations as institutions and discourses of modernity structure and discipline subjects, power and micropolitics in organisations, the desire and sexuality of organisation, the relationship between information systems and subjectivities in organisations.

<sup>44</sup> Ranging from various appropriations of Derridean deconstruction and Foucauldian analyses of organisations' discursive practices, to gendered and feminist critiques.



readings of specific postmodern theory<sup>45</sup>, the sorts of which have intrigued organisational researchers too in more recent times. The fear that postmodernism as a broad perspective advocates theoretical and, by extension ethical relativism (Parker, 1992), is a common criticism. It expresses reservations about the political and ethical problems of certain postmodern assertions, particularly those of an epistemological nature which tend to solipsism.

However, such a facile dismissal both of theoretical pluralism and postmodernism serves to mask out, on the one hand, the potential benefits of working with a plurality of theories, and on the other hand, of some of the useful insights of less 'extreme' versions of postmodern epistemology. Such a Giddensian criticism tends to 'straw-man' debates about postmodernism, thus ignoring its potential as a site for the critique and reconfiguration of conventional management and organisation theory, such as that instantiated by functionalist and normal scientific IMR. In this respect, Calas and Smircich (1999: 650) argue that the 'impact of postmodernism as a significant and positive contribution to organizational theorizing' lies in:

(...) the opportunities it has offered for reflecting upon the production of theory as a genre and as an institutional and cultural activity. By calling attention to the textuality of organizational theories, postmodernism has opened a space for a different form of criticism (...). Viewing theory as a representational form places decisions regarding "for what" and "for whom" we are going to speak in the core of our scholarship. (...) these questions have given way to different forms of writing theory and have allowed different theoretical "voices" to emerge. The postmodern turn has opened "the margins" of organization studies to be "written" by and for others whose theoretical voices have seldom been represented in our scholarship.

Although recent writings on organisation have been more critical of the contours of the debate on postmodernism (see, in particular, Parker, 1992, 1995), postmodern perspectives, particularly as they pertain to epistemology, have provided a more generic and much needed vehicle for transforming the theorisation of organisation. As social

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<sup>45</sup> My concern here with postmodern theory denotes the wider pre-occupation of this section with postmodernism as epistemology rather than postmodernity as a periodising concept.

and organisational researchers begin to look ‘past postmodernism’ (Calas and Smircich, 1999), a plurality of differently accented perspectives currently co-exist<sup>46</sup> within the field, which serve to endow the latter with the potential of simultaneously responding to the difficulties of conventional functionalist as well as certain recent postmodern approaches to organisation.

In giving a very brief survey of the ‘intellectual terrain’ of contemporary social and organisational theory, it has been my intention to suggest that its theoretical pluralism and its debates on postmodernism have been crucial sites for the reconfiguration of orthodox approaches to the study of social and organisational life. They each respond in very similar ways to the perceived crisis in the human sciences in recent years emanating from the critical scrutiny of its broadly functionalist orthodoxy. As such, the remainder of this chapter sets out to use some of the ideas and perspectives featured within this contemporary landscape as a textual location for developing a non-functionalist and non-managerialist approach to the study of difference within the context of this thesis. In contradiction to Giddens (1987), I would suggest that the many concepts and ideas which characterise this landscape can be usefully brought into conversation with each other such that they offer a fresh approach to the study of social and organisational phenomena. It is my particular concern that the construct of difference be accorded ontological and epistemological qualities which will enable me to construct a more sophisticated and variegated reading of its emergence in social and organisational contexts. However, one potential difficulty in such a conceptual reconfiguration of difference with recourse to contemporary social and organisational theory is that the latter’s broad contours necessitate a conscious focus on a limited number of ideas. As such, in the next sub-section 3.3.1, I map out key areas for critique

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<sup>46</sup> Calas and Smircich (1999) suggest that the most prevalent approaches to organisation theory which respond to the theoretical impasses of postmodernism currently include post-structuralist/feminist perspectives, postcolonialism, actor network theory and narrative/fictional accounts of organisation.



which will help focus a choice of the most relevant contemporary ideas in social sciences for the study of difference.

### **3.3.1 Delimiting a Critique of Difference**

As mentioned above, the very broad and complex nature of recent social and organisational theory means that an unnecessarily long, broad-brush overview of its contingencies would be of limited value. In this sub-section, it is my aim to tease out the specific facets of conventional approaches to difference alluded to in the last chapter which might be usefully re-examined and reconfigured with recourse to contemporary social and organisational theory. The first key issue is to reconsider the way in which the functionalist and managerialist orthodoxy of international management research has conceptualised the constructs of identity and difference, the key phenomena which this project sets out to investigate.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, international management researchers have approached the study of difference by attempting to tie it down and thus make it stand still for purposes of identification and subsequent comparison. It would seem to be conventionally believed that such comparison provides a kind of strategic knowledge which can be utilised by corporations to ‘manage’ the potential problems of international management communications. In the process of harnessing difference in this way, international management researchers have used a variety of classifications or categories. Most commonly these classifications have taken the form of ‘dimensions’, such as Hofstede’s (1980), which have been used by IM researchers to place boundaries around and thus ‘identify’ groups of managers whom they deem to be similar, and of course in the process producing managers who subsequently become different. Boundaries thus have the duplicitous ability to mark sameness and difference, insiders and outsiders, the Self and the Other at one and the same time. This differential ability

of boundaries to mark human identity has, in relation to the study of international managers, most often resulted in the construction of the kinds of crude Self-Other binaries exemplified in the previous chapter. Whilst these are clearly of value for purposes of comparison, giving the reader neat and tidy markings of difference, there are a number of problems with them. In outlining these problems, I draw upon such a crude binary which I found in Mills and Hatfield's (1999) scrutiny of international management textbooks. In their work, Mills and Hatfield highlighted the inherent reductionism and hidden imperialism of mainly American textbooks on IM. Of note here is the table taken from the work of one particular text, that of Newman *et. al.* (1972), which illustrates what these authors believe to be the 'differences' between 'American' and 'foreign' managers (see Table 2.8.).

The first problem to highlight with such constructions is their tendency to *essentialise* identities and difference. As Woodward (1997) points out, essentialism has been a key feature of the Modernist project and is based on a Cartesian view of the individual or the *cogito* as possessing an in-born, fixed and unitary identity which marks the Self inevitably, irrevocably and intuitively differently from the Other. By fixing identities in this way, essentialism effectively sidelines the human capacity for agency, particularly through language, and reduces the potential uniqueness and individuality of each and every human to a set of immutable attributes. Cooper (1990) calls this a classical system of ordering, one which is concerned with rationality, order and control, where the world is seen in terms of 'clear-cut boundaries and neat categories of thought' (168). And this is precisely what Newman *et. al.*'s table gives us.



**Table 2.8: Characteristics and beliefs of the American and the ‘foreign’ manager**

The American Manager	The Foreign Manager
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• self-determined</li> <li>• has realistic objectives</li> <li>• achieves objectives through hard work</li> <li>• ethically obliged to fulfil commitments</li> <li>• time is a crucial aspect of performance</li> <li>• primary obligation to the enterprise</li> <li>• gives undivided attention to the company</li> <li>• respects company rules and regulations</li> <li>• appoints the ‘best man’ for the job</li> <li>• fires ‘second raters’</li> <li>• has unlimited upward mobility</li> <li>• is free to move horizontally</li> <li>• egalitarian</li> <li>• rational decision-maker</li> <li>• frank and open</li> <li>• ambitious</li> <li>• respects all kinds of work</li> <li>• accepts change</li> <li>• results oriented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• driven by mysticism or fatalism (e.g., some ‘Moslem’ countries)</li> <li>• take to flights of fancy</li> <li>• curries favour to achieve objectives</li> <li>• inconsistent commitment</li> <li>• relaxed attitude to time (part of the charm of our Latin American friends)</li> <li>• primary commitment to extended family</li> <li>• sometimes takes bribes</li> <li>• lack respect for formal rules (e.g., ‘the Arab’)</li> <li>• uses nepotism to hire employees</li> <li>• is influenced by family, personal and political ties to keep certain people employed</li> <li>• is restricted by class and other non-work considerations</li> <li>• is loyal to a single company (e.g., Japan)</li> <li>• unconcerned with egalitarian principle</li> <li>• irrational, emotional decision-maker</li> <li>• polite but deceiving (e.g., Far Eastern cultures)</li> <li>• lacking in ambition</li> <li>• won’t take work ‘below his dignity’</li> <li>• resists change</li> <li>• concerned with appearances (e.g., Latin America)</li> </ul>

**Source:** *Newman et.al., (1972), in: Mills and Hatfield (1999): 51.*

The classification of the ‘American’ against the ‘foreign’ manager is a clear-cut boundary; the subsequent categories based on a set of binary oppositions, neat categories of thought. Bauman (1993) suggests that this classical temptation to bind, order and classify people is predicated on the belief that the wild profusion of human alterity can be known and controlled. He argues that such ‘rational ways’ of knowing about difference serve to disenchant the world by rendering the unknown, known and

the unpredictable, predictable. For Bauman, ordering difference is a vain exercise for all it serves to do is:

to replace diversity with uniformity, ambivalence with a transparent order – and while doing so this turns out unstoppably more divisions, diversity and ambivalence than it has managed to get rid of. (1993: 5)

Newman *et. al.*'s work is such an example of a transparent order. In reducing all managers to a set of fixed binary oppositions, these authors presume to have rendered knowable the multitude of differences which exist between American and non-American managers. Their simple act of homogenising all managers within these categories, whilst giving the impression of making all difference known and transparent, does not in fact serve to eradicate the heterogeneity contained within these boundaries; it merely serves to hide it and mask it out. Otherwise, it would serve to threaten the neatness and the certainty of the knowledge the authors present. As Bauman usefully indicates, the result of this is to turn out considerably more differences than it managed to get rid of, or as Geertz (1983) puts it, to exchange a well-charted set of difficulties (problems of identification) for a set of uncharted ones (the consequences of that difference). In this sense, knowledge of difference is inherently partial, foregrounding some things and obscuring others.

Exploring some of these uncharted difficulties allows us to scrutinise further problematic issues associated with essentialist accounts of identity and difference. In this respect, a second area of criticism, which relates very particularly to some of the diversity management literature portrayed in the previous chapter, suggests that constructs of difference contain within them social elements such as age, occupational or marital status, and even sexuality. The difficulty here is that these social elements are to a greater or lesser extent shifting entities, part of the 'social character of humanity' (Eriksen, 1995: 30) which renders problematic the assumption that they can be tied down. In relation to the work of Newman *et. al.*, their nomination of things like



commitment, family and personal ties and ambition can all be argued to be 'social' phenomena which will inevitably change in nature or shift over time. A related point here, which is once again slightly more relevant to the diversity literature, relates to the difficulties involved in establishing criteria for placing people into categories. Litvin (1997) for example discusses the divergent criteria which might be used to place people within the category 'elderly' (researchers could use chronological age, appearance, behaviour) and to attribute individuals to a specific racial grouping (place of birth, skin colour, ethnic heritage). Such questions begin to pick away at the assumption that identities and difference are fixed, natural or somehow obvious.

As alluded to above, the tendency to define cultural differences in terms of a fixed essence results in freezing difference and reducing the complexity of Other to simple categories. A consequence of this restriction of the Other to a particular category, say of national culture, is that it ignores the possibility that differences do not so much reside in any one category, but that they cut across several categories for signifying difference. In her study of the ways in which Asian immigrant women in the USA constructed their identities and differences, Hegde (1998), for example, asserted that cultural and ethnic identity could not be studied in isolation from other markers of identity such as gender, race or ethnicity and class. As she says (1998: 37):

Attempts to study race and gender as separate variables result in reductionism, or even erasure, and denial of the total experience of ethnic women; the reality of their lives is constituted simultaneously at the intersections of multiple hierarchies of race, class and gender.

A similar point is made by McClintock (1995) who suggests that such categories of race, gender and class do not exist in splendid isolation, but emerge concomitantly with each other. The story of difference therefore:

(...) is not simply about relations between men and women, or between black and white people, but how categories of masculinity and femininity, whiteness and blackness, labour and class came historically into being. (McClintock, 1995: 11)

The crude and totalising categories developed by authors such as Newman and his colleagues mask out the possibility that difference can take form at the intersection of a number of signifiers of difference, not just national culture for example. The ‘foreign’ manager is an extensive category which subsumes a large number of signifiers of difference, including those of gender, race and class mentioned by both Hegde and McClintock.

To re-iterate, the objective of this sub-section is to establish specific areas of critique which can be expanded upon with recourse to contemporary social and organisational theory in the next section, in an attempt to construct a critical and interdisciplinary conceptual framework for the study of difference. So far, I have pointed to the need to develop a framework which moves away from essentialist constructions of identity and difference towards one which recognises their shifting nature, accounts for their sociality and has the potential to theorise more than one difference at once. A further aspect of identities and differences which a more critically oriented study ought to consider is their inherent partiality, that is their politically contingent nature. As Lorbiecki (1998) suggests:

The invisible figures and influences in classifications can (...) be rendered more transparent if they are seen as an *exercise of power* (italics in the original) by those who make these classifications.

The use of classifications and categories by international management researchers are forms of partial knowledge in both senses of the word. On the one hand, they mask out at least as many aspects of difference as they cover, and on the other they privilege the signifier’s perspective, i.e. the person ‘doing’ the difference (Prasad and Mills, 1997). As such, constructions of identity and difference should never be regarded as knowledges which arise ‘naturally’ or contain absolute truths. They will inevitably be skewed by the interests of the person doing the signifying. Such a point is clearly



expressed in the work of Edward Said (1989) who, in illuminating the workings of hierarchical power/knowledge relations contained in 'First World'/'Third World' or 'developed'/'developing' discursive divides, shows how the knowledges produced by the former are rendered superior to those produced by the latter. It is this asymmetrical power/knowledge relationship that produces what Said calls the 'dreadful secondariness' of some people and their cultures, a point reflected in Calas's (1992) critical scrutiny of international management theory. In her text, Calas deconstructs IM texts to show how their rhetorical strategies construct the premise that only 'developed' people produce useful knowledge. These rhetorical strategies, again working off power/knowledge couplets, render so-called 'underdeveloped' people inferior, purportedly incapable of producing useful knowledge, and more significantly, incapable of representing themselves.

In this regard Newman *et. al.*'s classification of American and foreign managers can be seen as highly partial, functioning to render the former superior to the latter. Indeed, a cursory glance at the table shows that in each and every binary opposition, the 'American' manager is constructed as superior to the foreign manager. The American is self-determined, realistic, concerned with time, rational, frank and open. The foreign manager by contrast is fatalistic, taken to flights of fancy, has a relaxed attitude to time, is irrational and polite but deceiving. In other words, the American manager is the epitome of the Modernist, rational instrumental, 'good' manager; the foreign manager is all that contrasts with this, i.e. irrational, emotional, lazy etc. The signification of 'Otherness' can thereby be seen as an exercise in power in so far as it ranks or places certain people in the world as 'better' than others. Such a conclusion underlines the fact that constructions of difference contain within them judgements about the relative value and worth of human beings. Rather than presenting readers with natural, obvious and politically neutral portrayals of the Other, a critical scrutiny of international managerial

classifications highlights the ways in which they work through partial rhetorical strategies which position subjects and objects in asymmetrical power relations with each other. These power relations contain within them value-judgements which can ultimately serve to subjugate and render inferior the cultural Other, whilst simultaneously privileging the cultural Self.

In short then, the above paragraphs suggest that in addition to non-essentialist, shifting, and 'social' accounts of identity and difference, an alternative conceptual framework for the study of difference should take account of the political workings of these constructs. Taking these points together, what they collectively highlight is that the ability to signify difference is highly dependent on the process by which it is recognised, classified (Lorbiecki, 1998) and thus made real. In the case of international management research, this process has purported to be objectivist and objective in nature, presenting discrete and homogenising categories of Otherness through which it might come to be known and, of course, 'managed'. A critical scrutiny shows, however, that difference might be better seen as a highly partial category of analysis which privileges the signifier's perspective, gives little voice to the Other to represent itself and implicates value judgements which position the Self and the Other in political terms. Each of these areas of critique provides foci for the development of an alternative conception of identity and difference in international management. The next section works with these areas of critique and looks for more specific and contemporary ideas from social and organisational theory and, in particular cultural studies, in order to reconfigure difference.



### 3.4 From Identity and Difference to Identification and Differentiation

‘If identity does not proceed, in a straight unbroken line, from some fixed origin, how are we to understand its formation?’ This question posed by the eminent cultural studies theorist Stuart Hall (1990: 226) encapsulates neatly the key concern which guides this section of chapter three. With this question in mind, this section sets out to develop a non-functionalist and non-managerialist conception of difference, with recourse to the disciplines of social and organisational theory, and cultural studies. For purposes of initial clarity, it is perhaps useful to provide a general flavour of some of the key ideas I use to present an alternative conception of identity and difference to that conventionally posited in IMR. This should furnish the reader with a metaphorical ‘preface’ for reading through the remainder of the chapter.

First of all, the conceptual framework developed in the following sections might be labelled as broadly post-structuralist. It will suggest that identity and difference, rather than being fixed, stable and self-contained, are constituted and reproduced within the *process* of communication and everyday interaction (Hegde, 1998). Identities and differences are constructed and relational, not ‘given’ and essential. At the heart of this process is the notion of *representation*, a largely although not exclusively linguistic phenomenon<sup>47</sup> which includes the signifying practices and classificatory systems through which meanings are produced. It is through the meaning-making or signifiatory processes characterised by such systems and practices that identities and differences are constructed. The latter are constituted then within and not outside representation. As Hegde (1998: 37) points out, such a conception of the Self and the Other as socially constructed ‘reproblematizes practices of everyday life as sites to understand subjectivity as an ongoing process’. This emphasis on the ‘practices of everyday life’ highlights the need to focus on social actors’ ‘*local*’ constructions of

difference, an imperative which, on account of its implicit focus on *agency*, allows meanings to *shift*, to be *contested*, and to draw upon a *multiplicity* of possible signifiatory resources. In this light, it is possible to see such processes as ‘*social texts*’ written by social actors drawing upon a variety of sociocultural materials. Let us flesh out some of these ideas, beginning with the notion of identities and differences as processes.

### 3.4.1 The processual nature of identity and difference

Recent years have witnessed an explosion of interest in the topic of identity and its verso difference (Bauman, 1996; Hall, 1996). Much of this interest has been of a critical nature, critical in so far as it has involved the scrutiny of Western, Modernist notions of the bounded, essentialist *cogito* talked of in previous sections. Hall (1990), in a seminal piece on identity and difference, points to this latter, orthodox conception of Self as the first of two models on the production of identity debated within cultural studies. It is the second of Hall’s models on identity-production which is of immediate interest in responding to the essentialising tendencies of international management research. In this regard, Hall (1990: 222) states that:

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity ‘as a production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This view problematises the very authority and authenticity to which the term, ‘cultural identity’, lays claim.

There are two important elements in this quote. The first is the emphasis placed by Hall on the notion that rather than being passively determined by autonomous social structures, identities and differences are *actively* constructed or produced by social actors in a continuous search for Self. This idea immediately factors social agency into a reconceptualisation of difference, accenting the role of social actors to determine, at

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<sup>47</sup> Humans represent through various media of which language is one, albeit an important one. Other modes of representation include cultural practices such as art, photography, painting *inter alia*.



least to some extent, the contours of their similarities to and differences from others. The second element, building on the first, is Hall's suggestion that identities and differences are not unified and singular social facts, but social *processes* which take form in the *relational space* between the Self and the Other. Rather than being a property of the individual, according to this notion, identities and difference only emerge in relationships with others, relationships which are often characterised by conflict and exclusion. This idea undermines profoundly the functionalist orthodoxy of the social sciences which regards identities, like its other principal concepts, as 'hard' and 'clear-cut' social categories. As Gilroy (1997: 315) suggests:

This means that the self can no longer be plausibly understood as a unitary entity but appears as one fragile moment in the dialogic circuit that connects 'us' with our 'others'.

Such an idea is interesting because it automatically complicates the kinds of crude Self-Other binaries which, as argued in the previous chapter, characterise the field of IMR. Rather than seeing each side of the binary as a mutually exclusive social fact, Hall's second model of cultural identity and difference underlines the ways in which differences can be found *within* identities as well as between them (Gilroy, 1997): the Other thus comes to be seen as integral part of the Self. Ideas of Self are therefore inevitably mediated, represented and brought into being by ideas of the Other, thus suggesting, as Grossberg (1996: 89) argues, that 'identity is always a temporary and unstable effect of relations which define identities by marking differences'. Such a broadly post-structuralist notion of identification and differentiation lays emphasis then:

(...) on the multiplicity of identities and differences rather than on a singular identity and on the connections or articulations between the fragments or differences. (Grossberg, 1996: 89)

This notion of identities and differences provides critical input into all the areas of concern raised by the previous section. Firstly, it clearly moves away from essentialist notions of a 'core' Self towards a more social, processual or relational account of

identity and difference. Secondly, it paves the way for the theorisation of more than one difference at once, given its scope for multiplicitous and contested identities to co-exist. Thirdly, it underlines the collaborative and negotiated nature of identities and differences in so far as they each provide mutually constitutive ontological resources of the other.

At the heart of this initially brief sketch of identities and differences as emergent and processual phenomena is the concept of *representation*. Identities and differences do not exist of their own accord; they only come to exist by way of the human capacity for representation, a term which amongst numerous other definitions can be used to denote the production of meaning through language (Hall, 1997: 28). In fleshing out the skeleton of identification and differentiation introduced in this sub-section, I now move on to consider the issue of representation through language. Although language is certainly not the only representational mode available to most humans, it is the one which this thesis is centrally concerned with. I wish now to take forward the focus on language as a representational and thus constitutive process, and investigate the forms that such a process might take. It provides clarification of some of the ideas introduced above by asking questions like: How are identities and differences produced and taken up through practices of representation in language? How does representation work? Are there any linguistic concepts which might help us account for this? In this regard, Hall (1997) indicates a number of different approaches to representation which he labels the reflective<sup>48</sup>, the intentional<sup>49</sup> and the constructionist approach. My specific interest

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<sup>48</sup> The reflective approach to representation instantiates the types of assumption contained within the essentialist approach to identity. It suggests that language is simply a 'container' or 'transmitter' of meanings which already exist within the world of objects, people and events (Hall, 1997: 15). The difficulty with this approach lies in its assumption of an already-established world that can be commonly perceived and described. This notion serves to reduce the role of language to a carrier of meanings, rather than as a reality-constitutive phenomenon.

<sup>49</sup> The intentional approach understands language to provide a vehicle of expression for the intended meaning of the speaker/writer. As with the reflective approach, it assumes the existence of a unitary and integrated entity, in this case the core Self or the *cogito*, which emits meaning unproblematically through



lies in this latter approach which itself contains a number of differently accented positions ranging from Saussurean semiotics to Foucauldian discourse. My reason for laying emphasis on this generic approach to representation lies in its concern with language as a reality-constitutive phenomenon, rather than a carrier or container which unproblematically reflects the pre-existent meanings or intentions out there in the world of people, objects and events. This roughly reflects the assumptions inherent in my earlier account of the processual nature of identities and differences.

It is at this point that we can begin to draw more explicitly upon ideas from organisational theory which, like most social scientific disciplines in recent times, has become increasingly concerned with the role of language in productions of social and organisational realities. Two pieces of contemporary writing in organisation studies are relevant here. The first is Cooper's (1990) work entitled *Organization/disorganization* and the second is Parker's (1997) *Dividing organizations and multiplying identities*, both of which provide linguistic conceptions of the field's principal construct of organisation. Their respective works provide useful analogies for understanding the representation and thus production of identities and differences in language. The reason why their works provide useful analogies is that we can usefully conceive of identities and differences as themselves being processes or acts of 'organisation' and, by negation, disorganisation. Identification can be seen to involve the organisation of specific sociocultural materials which can be patterned by social actors into structures of sameness and thus identities. As such, there is a direct connection between notions of identity and difference, and notions of organisation and disorganisation, a link which is outlined in some detail in the works of Cooper and Parker respectively. What binds the work of these authors together, however, is not just the fact they are interested in thinking about organisation, but that they are interested in thinking about it in different

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language. Once again language is reduced to a carrier of meanings, rather than a reality-constitutive

ways to those of conventional functionalist writers in their area. Again there is overlap here with my own concern to configure a non-functionalist and non-managerialist approach to identity and difference within the context of international management research.

Beginning with Parker (1997), he sets about reconfiguring structural functionalist accounts of organisation by mobilising the linguistic concepts of nouns and verbs. Specifically, he points to the duplicitous capacity of words like 'organisation' to denote both a noun on the one hand and a verb on the other. According to Parker, structural theory has given precedence to the noun 'organisation' as the 'more or less stable 'outcome', or 'precondition' of human actions' (1997: 114). In other words, the structural functionalist orthodoxy has served to reify organisation into a thing, a noun, which is seen both as an *a priori* condition as well as a production of any human action, a point demonstrated in the previous chapter. And again as highlighted earlier, the result of this has been to sideline the role of human agency in constructions of organisation and to regard the latter as a 'material constraint' on social action. By contrast, Parker connects the notion of organisation as a verb to agency theory. As a verb, Parker talks about 'organizing processes' (114), a concept which certainly resonates with the earlier outline of Hall's processual conception of identity. Accordingly, organizing refers to:

(...) making more or less stable patterns—the use and continual revision of recipes, interpretive frameworks, accounts and so on that allow human beings to act as if the 'buzzing, blooming confusion' is ordered. In the most general sense (...) 'outcomes' are dissolved into a flow of interpretive practices. There is nothing stable here, simply a stream of revisable method for sense making, for doing 'parole', for organizing. (Parker, 1997: 114)

Having outlined the notions of organisation as a noun and a verb, Parker goes on to critique the structure-action duality (Knights, 1997) contained within the above representational approaches as 'probably overdrawn' (ibid). As such, he points to

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phenomenon.



attempts to transcend such dualism or, as he puts it, to ‘dissolve the breach’ (Parker, 1997: 15) and thus to authors (including Bourdieu and Giddens) that have attempted to develop a theory of nouns as verbs, and verbs as nouns. Importantly, Parker does not attempt to develop his own theory of the relationship between agency and structure, but goes on in his writing to demonstrate the ways in which ‘organizing’ can be seen as a ‘performance’ (and thus an active accomplishment) and not an end.

In this sense, actors (and researchers’) conceptions of what an ‘organization’ is could be seen as moments within endless organising processes’. (Parker, 1997: 115)

In other words, the fleeting glimpse of a unitary noun of organisation takes form along a chain of simultaneously disorganising verbs. This idea of organisation being created amongst disorganisation, of identity being created out of difference, is extensively detailed in the influential work of Cooper (1990) and is probably an important point of reference for the later work of Parker. Cooper theorises the ways in which unities or identities are made to appear out of disunities and differences. In other words, he demonstrates how social organisation of any sort, including those of human identities, is created around difference. And at the centre of his theory on difference lies the *boundary* or the *division*. In the next sub-section, I give an outline of Cooper’s theory of the inextricable link between organisation and disorganisation (between identity and difference).

### **3.4.2. On boundaries and divisions**

Cooper’s (1990) text is a polemic on the way in which conventional systems theorists and functionalists (notably, Parsons, 1951 and Blau, 1974) have written and talked about organisations as unitary structural forms. For purposes of clarity and to re-iterate a point made earlier in this chapter, I understand identities and differences to themselves be acts of organisation and disorganisation. As such, the reader should assume that the criticism being applied to the term ‘organisation’ (as well as ‘system’) in this sub-

section applies equally to the term identity. Taking inspiration from the work of Gouldner (1959), Cooper highlights the centrality of the boundaries (also referred to in his text as 'divisions' or 'frames') which create structures, rather than the structures themselves, as a more pertinent analytical vehicle for social and organisational theory. As such he wishes to relocate the 'boundary concept' (Cooper, 1990: 169) from its marginal position in social and organisational analysis to centre stage. In this subsection, I am interested in reading two particular things into Cooper's text. Firstly I look at the way in which he justifies such a theoretical relocation of this concept and based upon this, I focus secondly on the role of the boundary in creating organisations and disorganisations.

In terms of his rationale for foregrounding the notion of boundaries in organisational analysis, Cooper argues that systems theory's reliance on the concept of unity and thus unitary systems or organisations operating within wider environments, is the product of a particular *frame*. This frame acts to include and exclude certain things simultaneously within and outwith these unities. According to Cooper, what gets included and what gets excluded is the subject of a metalinguistic process of logical ordering and organisation. Implicitly echoing the work of anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966), what is said to lie outside the frame that creates the unity is regarded as less ordered and therefore less unified than what is included. By privileging unity and order in this way, that which falls outside of it implicitly becomes devalued or to use Douglas's (1966) term 'matter out of place'. In this case then, the relationship between organisation and disorganisation, unity and disunity, identity and difference is not an automaton. Rather, the relationship is constructed by the metalanguage (e.g. patriarchy, capitalism etc.) which is used to frame it and, in the process, to divide it up. This has important implications for systems theoretical and functionalist notions of organisation. As Cooper (1990: 170-171) argues:



It is (...) the *frame* (emphasis added by the author) which constitutes the relationship between system and environment and consequently it is the frame which provides the key to understanding the relationship between the two. (...) 'System' thus loses its position of centrality in the theoretical analysis and becomes an adjunct to 'boundary' and 'difference' which are then seen as the true problematics of social action.

These few sentences from Cooper have important implications for the development of a conceptual framework for this project's study of identity and difference in international management contexts. Most significantly it suggests that an analysis of identity and difference within such a context would be of limited value if it focused on these two terms as unified but separate wholes. By contrast, Cooper's work usefully indicates that a more fruitful analysis of social action in international management situations would be to focus on the divisions or the boundaries which allow identities and differences to exist as purportedly stable and cohesive wholes. As such this thesis will place an emphasis on investigating the divisions or the 'disorganisations', through which identities and differences come to exist as 'organised' social facts. This divisionary step has been consistently omitted by conventional organisational researchers who appear to have shown greater interest in the clear-cut boundaries and neat categories of thought of functional systems theory. In doing so, organisational researchers have neglected comment on the ambiguous nature of division or, to use Geertz's (1983) phrase 'the wildness of difference', as the site of a compulsion to order and organise. Focusing upon the frames through which this ordering of the disorganisation of division occurs impels, according to Cooper (1990: 172), greater attention:

(...) to the divisionary nature of the boundary (which) reveals that the work of organization is focused upon transforming an intrinsically ambiguous condition into one that is ordered, so that organization as a process is constantly bound up with its contrary state of disorganization. Seen in this way, the mutuality of the organization-disorganization opposition becomes a central issue in the analysis of social organization and social action.

This 'mutuality' of the organization-disorganization join underlines the fact the boundaries are inevitably deployed in a paradoxical fashion, that is to join as well as to

separate. It is the act of separation contained within the boundary which creates the perception of whole or unitary phenomena. Because the boundary belongs to neither of the terms which it marks, it is in fact the boundary which patterns the interactions and meaning-processes *between* social actors. The division is the determinant of the relational space talked about earlier in this chapter. To take a final quotation from Cooper (1990: 175):

The boundary may be shared, but it cannot be shared out; it is obdurate and intractable. This resistance to apportionment is a feature of the boundary's intrinsic undecidability.

This idea of undecidability is of course most commonly associated with the work of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida who provides anyone interested in division and difference with a particularly complex but engaging account of its nature. I will (attempt to) talk about his ideas in more depth in the following sub-section 3.4.3.

Before moving on to this however, it is useful to assess the significance of the material presented in the chapter thus far, in order to take stock of where we are. Firstly, I have argued that rather than conceiving identities and differences as unitary social facts, they can be more fruitfully seen as part of a relational process engaged in by social actors. This focus on process, or on identification and differentiation, conceives the latter as emergent and ongoing phenomena which take form through social agency. Secondly, I suggested that processes of identification and differentiation occur through the human capacity for representation, that is the production of meaning through language. Based on this assertion, I began to explore constructionist accounts of representation with recourse to ideas from social and organisational theory (Cooper, 1990; Parker, 1997). Drawing in particular on Cooper's work, I showed that representation takes place through the workings of the 'boundary concept' which serves the duplicitous capacity of organising and disorganising social phenomena. In other words, representation takes form through divisions which serve the paradoxical function of



joining as well as separating, and in the process creating the perception of the unproblematic existence of whole and unitary organisations. As such, I place the study of divisions or boundaries at the centre of my conceptual framework, since it is the key vehicle for the organisation and disorganisation of human identities and differences. This brings us thirdly to qualify the implicit assumption contained within much of the thesis thus far, namely that identity and difference stand in an 'equitable' relationship with each other in terms of their contribution to 'social work'. It is clear from Cooper's text that it is difference or at least 'division' which is the prime motor of organisation and thus identity. Because of this, I place a greater emphasis on the study of difference and take this idea forward into the next section. Earlier I presented a definition of representation as the production of meaning through language. In sub-section 3.4.3, I go on to look at the way in which difference has been appropriated into specific theories of language, focusing initially on Saussurean semiotics and then on the Derridean notion of 'undecidability' alluded to earlier. This will allow us to begin to situate the ideas on difference presented in this sub-section within a more specific theory of language.

### **3.4.3 From difference to undecidability**

Cooper (1990) argues that an account of Saussure's (1974) system of signs and Derrida's (1976) notion of undecidability provides a more 'systematic characterization' (174) of the role of difference in language. I begin by outlining and then evaluating Saussure's conception of difference, moving on after that to the work of Derrida.

The work of Ferdinand de Saussure, expressed most famously in his *Course in General Linguistics*<sup>50</sup> (1974), is an example of structuralist thought, that is one which understands language to be a structure or a system for human communication.

According to Saussure, this language system is made up of a variety of *signs* (such as sounds, images, words, and material objects like paintings or photographs) which serve to communicate ideas because they are part of a set of conventions (codes) which endow them with the capacity to signify. The sign contains two key elements: a signifier (the sound-image) and a signified (the meaningful concept). The signifier is the carrier of meaning or the vehicle by which social actors exchange meaning; the signified is the mental construct which the signifier leads to. Signification is the process which binds together signifier and signified to produce the sign and is the outcome of the social learning of the association of a signifier and what it represents. In relation to the present study, the important thing about Saussure's notion of signs is that they do not carry any intrinsic, fixed or essential meaning in themselves; rather they are defined in relation to other signs from which they are seen to *differ*. Hall (1997) exemplifies this using the colour red, arguing that what signifies red is not some essential notion of 'redness', but its difference from say green or yellow. As such Saussure conceives language as a system of differences which take the form of binary oppositions (e.g. young-old, male-female, black-white).

A number of criticisms have been made of Saussure's account of the sign. Firstly, difficulties have been raised with the apparent simplicity of the binary opposition as a way of accounting for difference in language. As Hall (1997) points out, for instance, the difference identified in binary terms between black and white ignores the various 'shades' which fall between the binary e.g. grey, cream, or brilliant white. This serves to mask out and thus marginalise specific signs which cannot be accounted for by the binary. A second area of criticism relates to the 'a-historical' nature of the structures which Saussure offers us. When claiming that meaning is a product of signification, he

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<sup>50</sup> It should be noted that Saussure's text was not authored by himself, but constructed from notes taken by students during his lectures. As such the book was already based on a cultural representation, that is a semiotic product not of the author himself but of his audience.



assumes that this is a process which is maintained by timeless and universal structures forming a stable and self-contained system of binary oppositions. This serves to ignore the diachronic aspects of language systems. A third difficulty with Saussure's model is its overwhelming focus on the formal aspects of language which drive attention away from the interactive and dialogic features of language which this thesis is concerned with. It ignores the way language is used in everyday situations between different kinds of people, an omission which inevitably leads to a lack of attention of the workings of power in language. Perhaps the most severe criticism of such a structuralist take on language relates to its assumption of a stable subject, stable object and stable binaries. Roland Barthes' damning re-reading of structuralist linguistics and the 'science of signs', and his proclamation of the 'death of the author' is surely of relevance here. Saussure conceives language as a closed system with stable workings and stable signifiatory processes. Barthes, by contrast, argues that because 'readers' create their own meaning from texts, regardless of the intentions of the author, 'texts' or signifiatory processes of any sort will inevitably involve changing and shifting meanings which render the text unstable and open to question. This equivocality of meaning applies equally to the scientists or structuralists who cannot stand outside such an approach to meaning-creation and therefore cannot stand outside their own text in order to observe prescribed aspects of science or language. This type of criticism can be extended by considering Saussure's other main contribution to the study of difference in language, namely his distinction between *langue* and *parole*.

According to Saussure, *langue* is a term which refers to the underlying rule-governed structure of language. It consists of the general rules and codes of the linguistic system which humans must share in order to be able to communicate. It is a kind of social 'grammar' which allows a shared possibility of meaning. As for the term *parole*, this refers to particular acts of communicating such as speaking or writing created by

individuals drawing upon the wider grammatical system of *langue*. As a structuralist, Saussure regarded the underlying rules and codes of language as a 'deep structure' which finds individual expression or utterance in the surface level of language, *parole*. This deep structure was thus seen as a fixed entity which was closed and limited in nature, and thus capable of definitional description. Both Cooper (1990) and Parker (1997) offer critical insights into this notion. Beginning with Cooper, he argues that there is an important contradiction in Saussure's work which serves to undermine his assumption of the fixed description of linguistic phenomena and thus the 'presence' of meaning contained within structuralist linguistics. He argues that what Saussure has really provided us with is a semantic conception of language which orders according to meaning, thus establishing the 'presence' of that meaning. However when it comes to the level of 'system', Cooper argues, this presence of meaning evaporates. Given that language is seen to be a system of differences, all signs come to be a 'negative product' (Cooper, 1990: 175) of other terms, i.e. they are given meaning because they are different and therefore *not* like other signs. Rather than signs denoting presences then, they can also be seen to mark absences; things they are not. Implicitly based on the work of Derrida whose work we come on to shortly, Cooper's critique turns Saussure's structural linguistics on its head. Rather than a structure of differences, language thus becomes:

(...) a structure of traces which, when followed, are seen to have no origin but are continually deferred and unfinished just as there is no end to the process of looking up the meaning of a word in a dictionary where one definition can lead to another. Language as a system reveals a structure that, far from the positivity and fixity of sign as meaning, is essentially incomplete and without solid foundation, with neither beginning nor end, based on the negative, on what is not. It is the continual deferral of presence that characterizes 'system' as a seriality of differences (...). (Cooper, 1990: 175)

In other words, it is the traces resulting from divisions and boundaries, rather than the fixed differential presences which characterise language as a system of representation. Moving on, whereas Cooper focuses specifically on the fixity of the sign, Parker



(2000b) is more specifically concerned to critique the fixity of the division of *langue* and *parole* (grammar and speech) outlined earlier. In his case, Parker suggests that language is not a communicative structure which can be indexed according to a particular set of fixed, universal grammatical rules. Rather he sees language as a 'permanently slippery matter that is always locally produced' (Parker, 2000b: 82). As such, to Parker, there is no such thing as one, unified language, but a multiplicity of 'cross-cutting languages' or, to use the term he prefers, 'dialects'. This notion serves to breach the fixed division between *langue* and *parole*, suggesting that the grammatical rules of the former are consistently made to shift locally by social actors into forms of language which sit somewhere between the structural status accorded to *langue* and *parole* by Saussure. Like Cooper, Parker is pointing to the difficulties of fixing difference in language in such a closed fashion.

Despite these criticisms, it is difficult to overestimate the contribution of Saussure's work to the theorisation of language. His structuralist take on language has provided an important template that has been used by many subsequent disciplines and writers, perhaps most notably in the structuralist anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss. According to Hall (1997) many writers on language have built on the work of Saussure by using his model in a much looser, more open-ended way (see, Cooper and Parker above, for instance). The philosopher Jacques Derrida (1976, in particular), already mentioned in this chapter, has been influential in developing the work of language begun by Saussure. His relevance to my own project stems not just from his connections with Saussure and their common concern with 'difference', but also because his work can be viewed as a contribution to the analysis of process rather than structure in social systems (Cooper, 1989: 479). Importantly, Derrida suggests that process is primary to structure, a point which re-iterates much of the conceptual work already carried out in this chapter and gives several important insights into its workings.

Some of these are already contained within the work of Cooper (1990) whose ideas are presented above.

The works of Derrida are numerous, complex, grounded in a wide range of difficult philosophical readings and controversial. Attempting to place his work within any one kind of academic discipline or philosophical school is futile since Derrida himself steadfastly refuses the possibility of such an accommodation. At the most general level, Derrida questions much Western metaphysical theorising on notions like truth, knowledge, writing and the authority of philosophy, but does not advance any overarching theory, concept or method of his own. This is important since it immediately brings us up against the writings, say, of many American readers of Derrida e.g. the deconstructionist group at Yale, which have been criticised for fixing the work of Derrida into a 'manage-able' theory and corresponding methodology called deconstruction (Norris, 1987). I am not interested in attempting an exhaustive overview of his work. Rather, I focus on two particular concepts from Derrida's work which I have already alluded to (vicariously through the work of Cooper at least), that of *undecidability* and *différance*. Derrida's notion of undecidability is useful since it has important implications for any commentary on social agency, something which this thesis has attempted to factor into considerations of a non-functionalist and non-managerialist conceptual framework. In dealing with these Derridean notions, there is one particular question which interests me and this relates to a criticism which is commonly levelled against his work. Does the notion of undecidability necessarily implicate an epistemological relativism? In other words, is it possible to make any meaning out of any text, a reading of Derrida which has led to him being accused of depoliticising social theory and fostering ethical relativism. To address this, I will outline briefly the key contours of these constructs.



Derrida's notion of undecidability takes as its foil the purported certainty which was believed to exist within various kinds of communicative texts, especially those of Western metaphysical philosophy. His task was to undermine the metaphysical thinking which has led to structuralist assurances of the certainty of meaning and an undivided point of origin for the signification of aspects of reality which seemed to lie beyond the empirically knowable world. Derrida termed this kind of thinking *logocentrism* since it centred human experience around the concept of an original 'logos' or presupposed metaphysical structure (Cooper, 1989: 482). The result of this logocentrism was a privileging of thought over language, whereby the latter becomes a vehicle for the transmission of the former. As Cooper points out (ibid) '(...) logocentrism determines a centripetal form of organization with a single essential metaphysical centre which assures stability and therefore certitude'.

Such logocentrism leads to the kinds of thinking highlighted earlier in this sub-section, involving hierarchised binary oppositions based on assumptions of presence. This presence is the product of a self-conscious *cogito* whose thoughts are present to its words. The result of this consciousness is that the first binary term comes to carry a full presence, with its subordinate, the term of absence of mediate presence (Collins and Mayblin, 1996). It is this kind of thinking which enables the philosopher to think about difference as a binary structure which in turn allows for the unproblematic presence of unified but separate linguistic entities. As alluded to earlier, Derrida argues against this idea of a fully present reality that is directly and unitarily available for our experience. Rather he posits the idea of reality as a continuously deferred chain of absences and presences, a notion which Derrida explicates through the notions of undecidability and *différance*.

The former concept refers to Derrida's unsettling of the stability of the binary and its assumption of the presence of the first term and the absence of the other. Between this presence and absence is what Derrida calls the trace, or a structural undecidability at the purportedly stable origin of meaning. As highlighted earlier, we can thereupon reconfigure the binary relationship by arguing that opposing terms actually inhabit each other rather than being separated by their presence and absence. In this way, division can be seen both to separate as well join together: it is the act of separation that creates the sense of a unitary whole. As such we might say that language is therefore not based on a stable set of binaries, but on an interweaving movement between what is there and what is not. This is important since, if the trace is a constant sliding between presence and absence then words cannot establish full and replete presence and therefore full and replete meaning. Meaning thus includes identity (what it is) and difference (what it isn't). As Cooper (1989: 488) suggests, Derrida dramatises this processual nature of difference as distinct from its meaning of 'fixed presence' by using the concept of *différance*.

The significance of this term lies in its reference both to the notion of 'difference' as well as 'deferral'. This latter signification denotes the sense of continuous movement, the notion that difference implicates a continuous absence, something beyond our grasp. It is at this point that we can make an important observation about the nature of agency in Derrida's work. Derrida suggests that the reason that this movement of difference, this process of deferral in language is not visible in the analysis of social action is because it is actively *suppressed* by social agents. Accordingly, social agency involves the repression and censorship of that which threatens the stability of meanings, namely the structural undecidability of the *logos*. It is the potential of repression which gives the social agent its power (a point which provides a way of developing the a-political notions of Saussure) and allows us to understand the nature of agency as that which



allows particular stabilisations to be held in place, albeit temporarily. Cooper (1990: 181) neatly summarises the theoretical development of Saussure's ideas on difference, towards the idea of difference as undecidability:

It is clear that the concept of difference provides a way of understanding social systems as contrived devices whose stability and identity rests to a large extent on the suppression of the movement of difference. Especially in the work of Derrida, concepts such as *différance*, undecidability (...) 'decompose' or 'deconstruct' the ordered and organized character of social systems to reveal their essentially precarious foundation which founders on the process of differentiation.

Having now outlined the Derridean concepts of undecidability and *différance*, I now return to the question which was of initial concern to me in exploring some of Derrida's ideas. Does the notion of undecidability necessarily implicate an epistemological relativism? In other words, is it possible to make any meaning out of any text, a reading of Derrida which has led to him being accused of depoliticising social theory and fostering ethical relativism. In short, my reading of Derrida would negate this kind of criticism. In relation to the first question, a common criticism of Derrida is that, on account of his assertion that meaning has a certain 'undecidable' element, he relativises meaning and thus denies the possibility of any kind of shared text. To me, this seems like a misappropriation of his work. I read Derrida as someone interested not in destroying the potential for meaning-making, but in the 'de-absolution'<sup>51</sup> of the claims made about meaning in Western metaphysical thought. Rather than suggesting that there are an infinite number of meanings for any sign, I read Derrida to believe that there is never just one. A more plausible reading of the social text will come from the particular context in which it is substantiated. This is subtly different. In relation to the second question, a connection is made between Derrida's purported negation of all signifiatory processes and the impossibility therefore of any kind of ethical narrative. It is suggested that Derrida is espousing the ethical equality of all actions, behaviours

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<sup>51</sup> This is a neologism used to denote Derrida's belief that meaning is not a stable, unitary and absolute phenomenon but one which is open to competing and multiplicitous interpretation.

and languages, thus perpetuating in turn a social *status quo* riddled with acts of oppression, violence and social and economic marginalisation. However, Derrida might also be read as not asserting that everything is of equal value, but that this question should remain open (Collins and Mayblin, 1996). Not to do this would be to singularly fail in Derrida's battle against closure; infinite textual openness can be as damaging as narrow-minded closure. One smaller point to raise here is the way in which critics of Derrida have conceived of the notion of text. Kincheloe and McLaren (1994: 144) for instance state that:

Postmodernism would seem to reduce history to the supplementary of signification or the free-floating trace of textuality.

Firstly there is the frequent assumption here that Derrida is a 'post-modernist'. I am not so sure about this appellation. My own preference is to label him (if needed) a post-structuralist. But secondly, there is an assumption here that 'text' as a form of social reality is somehow immaterial or a-historical in terms of its impact on social action. It might be argued that rather than ignoring history, text actually creates it, or continually re-writes it (Lilley, 1997), and that it is made of and transforms a variety of social materials. In this sense, text is very 'real' in so far as it acts upon social reality in sometimes quite constraining. Section 3.5 of this chapter talks at greater length about the link between history and everyday practice as constituents of identificatory and differential social processes.

Throughout this sub-section, I have attempted to ground the study of boundaries and divisions identified in the previous sub-section within a more specific theory of language. To this end, I have reviewed and critiqued some of the work of Saussure and Derrida who both concerned themselves in very variegated ways with the construct of difference, and explored their instantiations in the work of the contemporary social and organisational theorists, Cooper and Parker. Based on this review and critique, I would



suggest that a fruitful way of configuring division in terms of language is from a broadly post-structuralist position such as that exemplified by Derrida and appropriated by Cooper and Parker to differing extents. This recognises the non-fixity of signs and provides a way of conceptualising the ensuing signifiatory movement by privileging the study of boundaries and divisions as the creators of social reality. As such, a study of the social processes through which emerge human identities and differences is tantamount to a study of the divisions which separate but simultaneously join these differential and purportedly unified social phenomena. In the final sub-section of this chapter, I bring together the key points outlined in this and the previous two sub-sections under the concept of the 'labour of division' (Munro, 1997).

#### **3.4.4 The labour of division: identity and difference as processes of organisation and disorganisation**

This sub-section brings the key points together of this section summarised above, under one particular concept which I label the 'labour of division'. This choice of label is of course not accidental, but represents the theme of a conference held about the very topic of difference at the Centre for Social Theory and Technology, Keele University (1995), the proceedings of which were published in the book *Ideas of Difference* in 1997 (Hetherington and Munro, 1997). In this sub-section I outline the meaning of this phrase as a keystone in my conceptual framework, drawing upon some of the ideas already presented in the chapter, and in particular I look at the historical nature of division in clarifying my position vis-à-vis structural and agency theory. In doing this, I briefly rely upon the work of Munro (1997) and then return to the ideas of Parker (1997) since his most closely relate to the themes of identity and difference which this thesis wishes to pursue.

In his introductory chapter to the book, Munro (1997) explains the reason for the direct juxtaposition of the phrase the 'labour of division' with its sociologically better known

term the 'division of labour'. In short it used to signify a notion of the world which moves away from the assumption that its divisions are fixed and taken-for-granted resources or 'things-in-themselves', to one in which divisions become a topic for social action through which difference comes to emerge. In other words, divisions are no longer seen as fixed or natural, but are implicated in the performance of difference by social actors. To quote Munro (1997: 17) '(...) divisions are seen as cultural artefacts that are consumed and reproduced continuously'. The privileging of the term 'labour' is meant to denote the sense in which 'difference' is an act of social 'work', that is the accomplishment or the production of the labouring social agent. Munro suggests that this 'labouring' has two important aspects. Firstly 'we labour for division' (Munro, 1997: 4), in other words, we mobilise 'di-visions' in order to create 'visions', that is particular ways of seeing the world. Hence there is no vision without division (ibid). Having laboured to divide, Munro argues that social agents then continue to labour in order to 'hold on' to the views that they have subsequently created. We work to hold down our 'visual' perspective. Labouring is thus the work of disorganisation and organisation, of differentiating in order to identify, reproducing differences to accomplish identities. Here we see the duplicitous capacity of the division to join as well as separate.

It is precisely this duplicitous notion of the labour of division which Parker (1997) draws upon in his study of organisational culture and identity, a study which is fleshed out in much greater depth in a later book (Parker, 2000b). In his study, Parker conceptualises (business) organisations as sites for such 'labourings of divisions', suggesting that organisations (as 'material nouns') are sites for other kinds of organisations (in this case, 'verbs') which continuously disorganise (hence the relationship described above between organisation as a simultaneous noun and verb). In his writing, he demonstrates how divisions act as such simultaneous



organising/disorganising forces in the ways in which members of organisations create their identities. As he puts it:

Organizing does division-ing in order to produce organizations. Hence, organizing produces identities—sites that enable particular classifications of similarity and difference. (Parker, 1997: 117)

On account of this paradoxical functioning of the division, Parker asserts that organising processes will inevitably entail an ‘unending process of contested classifications’ (ibid), a facet of organisation which means that in turn the identities and differences of organisational members should be seen as similarly contested. A further point that Parker makes is that organisational members may deploy a large variety of different resources in marking similarities and differences. As a consequence of this vast resource for difference, Parker suggests that organisational identities are usually multiple identities, rather than the unitary kind which he found to exist in much of the literature on organisational culture. The particular configuration of divisions mobilised to create these multiple identities will be contextually patterned, he argues, a point which provides him with a springboard to outline the multiplicity of identities he saw in the three organisations which he studied.

One particular point that I would like to develop from Parker’s work in bringing this section to a close is the way in which he deals with the question of structure-agency. In other words, are divisions mobilised by social actors in pure acts of voluntarism, or are social actors in fact materially constrained in their signifiatory processes by the deterministic impulse of the division? The problem with such a stark framing of the structure-agency debate is that it frequently leads to stark responses which tend either to the complete determinism or the absolute relativisation of social action. Like Parker, who suggests a ‘meso-level’<sup>52</sup> or ‘intermediate point’ (2000b: 93), I find this stark

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<sup>52</sup> I would like to re-iterate Parker’s point that such a ‘meso-level’, as well as the micro and macro levels which it is purported to fall between, is not a ‘real’ thing, but a useful analytical device. This allows

forced duality an unhelpful one. There are several notions which help clarify my position on this forced duality and which express, in differently accented ways, roughly the same sentiment. These are the ethnomethodological distinction between the 'topic' and the 'resource', Hall's (1990) distinction between 'Being' and 'Becoming' and Wigley's (1995) concept of recursion. All of these suggest, in their various ways, that divisions do not come from nowhere and that as such, they have historical contingencies which come to be transformed, re-divided and thus re-historicised in the work of everyday practice. To quote Hall on cultural identity (1990: 225):

Cultural identity (...) is a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past (...) identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narrative confines of the past.

Identities and differences thus give the provisional impression of being unitary and hard-edged 'organisations' which are continuously being 'disorganised' through the everyday practices of change and re-historicisation. The labour of division is therefore a concept which allows us to trace the continuous work of organisation and disorganisation which characterises the construction identities and differences within the context of contemporary business organisations.

### **3.5 Discourse and Difference**

In the extensive section above, I was particularly concerned to develop a non-functionalist and non-managerialist conception of identity and difference which would deal with the particular areas of critique identified in sub-section 3.3.1 (non-essentialism, shifting meaning, social agency). There is one final issue emphasised in this sub-section which I have not yet dealt with explicitly and that is the issue of *power* in processes of identification and differentiation. As Parker (1997: 135) argues,

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Parker (2000b: 93) to 'situate (his) my analysis at the meeting point of a duality that I am linguistically



identities and differences are not the democratic and stable outcomes of multiple claims, but ‘a continuing process of articulating contested versions’ of organisational sense-making. As he writes in his later book (2000b: 90):

The sense we make (of organisations) is only ever enacted within a specific political and historical context. (...) organizational actors’ ideas of identification and difference always originate from their own politics and history.

This quotation contains two important elements. Firstly, it flags up the role of interests in processes of identification and differentiation, i.e. the fact that the creation of certain identities and differences rather than others within organisations is contingent upon the political interests of the social actors, e.g. to legitimate or reinforce a privileged position within an organisation. Secondly, the focus upon history, also a key theme in the work of Hall (1990, 1996, 1997), suggests that the divisions mobilised in social action come to the social arena with legacies of privilege or exclusion which then become re-historicised within the present context. So, in order to talk about racial or gender divisions within organisations, it would seem imperative to consider the political relationship between the categories of say masculinity and femininity, or blackness and whiteness (McClintock, 1995) which act as the historical legacies of past organisational interactions within present ones. What we need to do with these notions of politics is to relate them to language in order to develop further our examination of the role of language within processes of representation.

The social theorist whose writings are clearly of relevance here is Michel Foucault (1977, 1978), particularly his notion of discourse which I have already drawn upon in this thesis (the Foucauldian notion of discourse was used to frame the analysis of the IMR literatures contained within the previous chapter. As such, please see the initial pages of chapter one for a definition of discourse). There are three key facets of my reading of Foucault’s notion of discourse which are relevant to this chapter. The first is

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often forced to treat as a dualism’.

that his notion of discourse goes beyond the study of language, or text, as a system of representation and sees language as a social practice. Although he was interested in analysing particular texts and representations as semioticians did, he seemed more inclined to explore the whole discursive formation (including specific rules, statements, contexts) to which a text or a practice belonged. The second area of Foucauldian concern is one of history and the disciplining structures of discursive histories which frame present social action. This allows us to consider divisions as historical legacies of wider discursive formations within society. The third issue of interest for Foucault was the way in which the knowledge which was constructed through these discursive practices served to define the identities and regulate the conduct of others in ways which led to the marginalisation of others. Based on the power/knowledge couplet also alluded to earlier in the thesis, this enabled Foucault to attempt to trace the workings of power in social life. As such, drawing upon the notion of Foucauldian discourse allows me to develop notions of identity and difference which not only ground it in a specific theory of language, but also locate it within the workings of power relations in social life. Hall (1997: 47) provides a useful summation of the contribution of Foucault in developing linguistic conceptions of representation:

This (Foucault's) foregrounding of the relation between discourse, knowledge and power marked a significant development in the constructionist approach to representation (...). It rescued representation from the clutches of a purely formal theory and gave it a historical, practical and 'worldly' context of operation.

As such, the concept of discourse and its emphasises on power overlaps and in turn develops the post-structuralist ideas on language and representation of Derrida, Cooper and Parker outlined in the previous section. The reason it does so is because both Derrida and Foucault, in an area of 'common concern' (Cooper, 1989: 499), are interested in the ways in which binary oppositions are implicated in the production of each other. Both Derrida and Foucault are interested in the ways in which seeing



always and simultaneously involves not seeing, in which visions always implicate di-visions, in which unity always involves disunity, in which foregrounding certain identities and differences always involves masking out and marginalising others. For Foucault, these specific ways of seeing, these visions, inevitably become normalised and naturalised to the extent that they render invisible the di-visions which create them. Foucault uses the power/knowledge couplet to explicate how this happens.

However, it is not so much the work of Foucault which I wish to develop further in this chapter. The reason for outlining briefly my reading of Foucault is not so much because I wish to pursue a wholly Foucauldian organisational analysis in subsequent chapters. Rather these ideas allow me to understand better the work of post-colonial writer Edward Said who has explicitly appropriated the work of the French philosopher. I use Said's work, contained most notably within his text *Orientalism* (1978), as a vehicle for a political reconfiguration of difference within IMR, one which takes stock of the role of social actors' interests and historical divisions in its subsequent analysis. In the following sub-section, I outline what I understand to be the key ideas of Said's (1978) work. The work of Said enables us to understand the political effects of representational processes and, in particular, the ways in which these processes involve the simultaneous privileging of certain identities and differences and the marginalisation of others within social action.

### **3.5.1 The Idea of Orientalism**

The publication of Edward Said's book *Orientalism* in 1978 was a landmark not only in the author's discipline of literary criticism, but also in many of its intellectual neighbours such as cultural studies, sociology and social theory, politics and international relations, and European, Oriental and African Studies. The success of Said's work lay, as Gandhi (1998) explains, in his systematic and complex unravelling

of the way in which principally Western European scholars (writers, poets, linguists, philologists, historians *inter alia*) constructed knowledge of the 'Orient' (everything that was not Europe) in their work. In particular, Said explored the sets of representations (categories, classifications, images) utilised by these scholars in producing their accounts of the Oriental Other. In doing so, he placed a central emphasis on the notion of the Orient as a cultural *production* rather than a mere reflection of an existing reality since, for him and many subsequent scholars of his work:

(...) as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. (Said, 1978: 5)

Orientalism can therefore be seen as a 'Western' set of epistemological practices and cultural constructions which served to *create* its object of study, rather than a set of descriptive practices for articulating the contours of an *a priori* reality called the Orient. Such an idea clearly resonates with the notions of division and difference presented in the previous section: that its instantiation in language is a reality-constitutive phenomenon. Of central importance to these epistemological practices is Said's argument that they form part of an *exercise of power* by which an active Western subject, in this case the European scholar, *knows and masters* a passive Eastern subject, the particularities of the Orient. As Easthope and McGowan (1992) suggest, Said's *Orientalism* in effect documents the ways in which the former governs and dominates the latter and exposes the relations of power inherent in such systems of representation which, to a large extent, protest their innocence under the guise of scholarship. As such, Said's work provides us with some insights into the political and by extension ethical dimensions of difference.

Underpinning this notion of Orientalism as a cultural construction produced within a specific set of power relations is Michel Foucault's concept of discourse mentioned at



the beginning of this chapter. Conceptualised as a type of Foucauldian discourse, Orientalism thus becomes a way of structuring, regulating and locating the Orient through the production of a series of minutely detailed knowledges of it. Or, as Said (1978: 3) puts it:

(...) a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient.

As Easthope and McGowan (1992: 243) point out, ‘what occurs in the process of the production of these knowledges is the whole fictioning of a culture or cultural meanings which is regulated in such minute ways that it comes eventually to be regarded as natural’. It is this emphasis on the way in which the cultural production of knowledge of the Other becomes naturalised that is so vital to an understanding of Orientalism. For, as a consequence of its ‘naturalisation’, the ideological activities and political interests which serve to produce these knowledges become masked and banished to the discursive margins, with the effect that what is paradoxically foregrounded (the non-western Other) is a form of truth perceptibly ‘free’ of any sort of ideological domination or political distortion. However, as Said goes on to explain, the ‘naturalisation’ of the knowledge of the Other is neither neutral nor value-free. This is clearly epitomised in the classic hierarchical power/knowledge relations contained in First/Third World or ‘developed/developing’ discursive divides highlighted earlier which render knowledge(s) produced by the (Western) First World purportedly superior to that produced by the Rest of the World. Discourses have the capacity to hide their political currency.

The final and perhaps the most important point of Said’s text is that because he suggests that the Orient exists largely as a ‘fiction’<sup>53</sup>, it might equally be seen as a fiction necessary to the construction of an opposing fiction – that of the West. This suggests

that neither the identity of the Occident nor the Orient is a mutual automaton or for that matter, inherent in either. Both are produced in a dialectical relationship of difference between the two, such that traces of each can be found in both constructs. Here we see a direct relationship between the parts of my conceptual framework developed in the previous section and the post-colonial work of Said. What Said adds, however, is a specific way of conceptualising the workings of power in processes of identification and differentiation<sup>54</sup>.

### **3.5.2 'Postmodernism' and the politics of Orientalism**

In the previous sub-section, I outlined the key ideas contained within Said's work on Orientalism and argued that these provide a useful way, and one which is certainly coherent with the theoretical ideas already presented in this chapter, for conceiving of the workings of power in social relations. In this final sub-section of the chapter, I would like to make it clear that drawing upon Said's work is not only useful in providing me with a component for the conceptual framework of this thesis. In addition to this, I see my use of his work, as well as others which might label themselves 'postcolonial', as contributing in broader terms to the critique of so-called 'post-modern' social and organisational theory.

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<sup>53</sup> The use of the term 'fiction' is not meant to suggest that the concepts had no 'real' or 'material' effects; quite the contrary. It is simply meant to denote that it does not exist on its own, but that it is a cultural construction which acts in sometimes very deterministic and constricting ways.

<sup>54</sup> Said is useful for my conceptual framework because he gives me a way to think about the workings of power in processes of identification and differentiation. There are however difficulties with his work that I should mention briefly. Grossberg (1996) points to two key criticisms. Firstly it has been noted that Said's text condemns any attempt to represent the Other, since according to him, it inevitably implicates the subjugation of the Other. Secondly, Grossberg accuses Said of ignoring the political history of the relationship between ontology and epistemology in relation to the question of whether the 'Oriental' exists apart from Orientalism (i.e. does it exist outside discourse). In following Foucault, Said would seem to be of the belief that there does exist a material reality called 'the Orient' (consisting of actual material processes of colonisation, travel, domination) which goes beyond the discursive. He does not dispute this; Orientalism does have a material quality. To quote Grossberg (1996: 96) 'The act of power comes not in creating something from nothing, but in reducing something to nothing (to pure semantic and differential terms)'. Said's concern then is with the way in which knowledges reduce and render the Other the repository of difference.



As mentioned in section 3.3 of this chapter, using the term ‘postmodern’ to describe anything at all renders the writer a hostage to the fortune of definition and the subsequent criticism that one is ‘pastiching’ or ‘straw-manning’ post-modernism. To be clear, the term ‘postmodern’ social and organisational theory is used here to refer to the work of writers such as Lyotard who express ‘incredulity towards metanarratives’ and emphasise the fragmented, the local, and the relative status of knowledge. In an engaging article in which he argues against such Lyotardian relativistic, even solipsistic postmodernism, Parker (1995) suggests that the main problem with this form of social and organisational theory is that it provides no grounds for a politically or ethically oriented analysis of organisation. For as he says (1995: 557):

(...) if we decide that all matters are relative, it seems incumbent on us to either stop writing, on the grounds that nothing we say has any particular importance, or re-establish new grounds from which to pursue our practice if we still believe it to be valuable.

One of his particular foils is the work of Jean-François Lyotard whose (1984) Report on the *Postmodern Condition* was specifically concerned with identifying new forms of knowledge which would reflect the conditions of late capitalist society. In short, Lyotard advocated a micropolitics of knowledge, one which emphasised the need to conceive knowledge as locally contingent, diverse and fragmented. He critiqued Modernist notions of knowledge which relied on discursive narrative for their truth-value and argued for the co-existence of a plurality of different kinds of knowledge about society and culture. As Best and Kellner (1991) point out, one of the problems with such epistemological constructions is that they ignore the continuing presence of grand narratives such as patriarchy and capitalism within organisational processes. Although constructed and experienced locally, these narratives still have the capacity to act in ways which constrain organisational action across a variety of different social and cultural thresholds. The tendency in Lyotard’s work then, is to ignore the political and historical legacies of organisational narratives particularly when they act in materially

constraining ways, thus allowing their often repressive workings to perpetuate further a politically divisive *status quo*.

Such a concern is also present within the work of Said, a writer whose work gives me in turn a reason to write. A key point about the politics of Orientalism is the following: Said's exposure of both Western and Eastern 'cultures' as grand works of fiction should not be confused with postmodernism's preoccupation with the 'end of history' or the loss of 'grand narratives'. Although Said and 'postmodernists'<sup>55</sup> are both equally interested in discourses and narration, Said is critical of 'cults like post-modernism', since they afford their adherents 'an astonishing sense of weightlessness with regard to the gravity of history' (Said, 1993: 366-7). As Ansell-Pearson *et. al.* (1997) take great pains to point out, Said, in his unfolding narrative of Orientalism, demonstratively makes known his solidarity with populations despised and rejected by the West's dominating social order, with his self-located intellectual representations deliberately tied to 'the poor, the disadvantaged, the voiceless, the unrepresented, the powerless' (Said, 1994: 84). This post-colonial perspective enables us to consider postmodernism as yet another Western ideology embedded in Eurocentricism i.e. 'Eurocentricism masquerading as authentic universalism' (Radhakrishnan, 1994: 309). Postmodernism's total rejection of universalism, in favour of a rigorous and at times uncompromising relativism, presents, therefore, a further though nihilist grand narrative, in which postmodernism can have nothing to say about other cultures and their marginalisation (Turner, 1994; Sardar, 1998).

I bring this sub-section to a close with a couple of quotations from Parker. Firstly in relation to the study of organisations, he asserts (1995: 558) that:

(...) we have a responsibility to be clear about why we wish to tell a particular story in a particular way and that is essentially the arena of politics.

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<sup>55</sup> Again, I am aware of the totalising and homogenising capacity of this noun, but use it as a typification of sorts.



If we regard theories as stories, then we can see a purpose in taking responsibility for these stories as follows:

Surely the purpose of any good theory is not only to relativize the world, but to critique it in the hope of changing it. It then becomes incumbent upon us to be clear about what aspects of organizations we wish to change and what our intended outcome might be. (Parker, 1995: 562)

The story I am interested in telling is one about the ways in which social actors within organisations create their identities and differences through their various labourings of division and the ways in which these labourings serve to privilege certain members of organisations, whilst simultaneously marginalising others. My narrative concern then is with the way in which business organisations are not just sites for identification and differentiation, but sites where these processes position organisational members in unequal relation to each other. I am interested in telling this story in an attempt to bring to light and perhaps encourage social actors, including myself, to reflect upon their complicity in this politics of representation. I try to do this with recourse to an empirical study which will attempt to outline the ways in which the divisions social actors bring to the world serve to organise and disorganise that world in inherently partial ways.

The objective of this chapter has been to develop and justify a non-functionalist and non-managerialist conceptual framework for this thesis. To this end, I have drawn upon contemporary ideas and insights from two key disciplines, those of social and organisational theory, and cultural studies, which have yet to penetrate the hegemonic influence of functionalism and managerialism in international management research. Having given a broad overview of contemporary social and organisational theory, I went on to delineate particular concerns with conventional theorisations of difference which required some 're-working'. Specifically I pointed to the need for an account of difference which might be broadly characterised as non-essentialist, social, processual,

multiplicitous, contested and political. Section 3.4 set out to deal with these specific concerns. It began by underlining Stuart Hall's (1990) call for the processual theorisation of identities and differences at the heart of which lies the human capacity for representation which I defined as the production of meaning through language. I took Hall's concern for representational process forward by grounding it within a discussion of the role of difference in language. From a starting point that representation works through the placing of boundaries of divisions, I highlighted the paradoxical role which the latter play in joining as well as separating organisations and disorganisations, identities and differences. The 'active' production of identities and differences denoted thereby was mobilised as a critique of Saussure's assumption of the fixity of the sign, a critique which was developed further through a discussion of Derrida's notion of undecidability and *différance*. I read Derrida as a post-structuralist who argues that meaning is an open and not an absolute or solipsistic phenomenon which takes form in the movement of semantic presences and absences. Towards the end of section 3.4 I drew all these points together under the concept of the 'labour of division' (Munro, 1997; Parker, 1997). Accordingly, I considered identities and differences to be acts of organisation and disorganisation which, whilst giving the temporary illusion of being fixed, are continuously and actively reproduced through the deployment of a variety of different divisions and boundaries by social actors. As such the 'labour of division' acts as the first of two keystones in my conceptual framework.

The second keystone in developing a non-functionalist and non-managerialist framework came from the post-colonial writer Edward Said, and in particular his text *Orientalism* (1978). The use of Said allowed me to do two things. Firstly, given his reliance on the earlier work of Foucault, his concept of Orientalism enabled me to extend my discussion of the role of divisions by moving it beyond the level of language to the level of discourse, of which language is part. Secondly, it allowed me to bring a



political dimension to the study of difference, furnishing me with a perspective on the way in which discourse works to privilege certain identities and differences whilst simultaneously marginalising others. The next chapter documents the translation of this framework, in tandem with the aims and objective established at the end of chapter two, into an appropriate empirical research study. It will present and justify the design and execution of the 18-month multi-method study which was carried out as part of this thesis.

### RESEARCH DESIGN

#### 4.1 Summary

*The objective of this chapter is to present and justify the design, development and execution of the 18-month multi-method research study which was carried out in order to capture some of the empirical dimensions of difference. As such, it documents the translation of the previous chapters' theoretical questions and concerns into an appropriate empirical investigation. Beginning in section 4.2, I re-iterate the key research questions and overall theoretical framework developed in the literature review as an appropriate context for the research study. Section 4.3 discusses the relative merits of positivism and interpretivism as potential methodological perspectives for the development of the research study. A broadly interpretative methodology is thereupon advocated, the implications of which are discussed in section 4.4 in terms of site selection and sampling and in 4.5 in terms of appropriate research methods for the investigation. In section 4.6, I reflect upon the development of the research process and in 4.7 conclude with a discussion of various approaches to data interpretation as well as an account of the actual interpretative strategy adopted.*

#### 4.2 Introduction

The previous two chapters have set out the literature and theoretical bases for this thesis. Beginning with chapter two, it presented a critical review of the ways in which the construct of difference has been conventionally conceptualised within the various literatures that comprise international management research (IMR). Specifically the chapter illuminated how IMR's discursive orthodoxies of functionalism, normal science and managerialism had served to structure and subsequently normalise a particular understanding of difference, namely one which conceived it as an objective category of analysis. Chapter three then went on to develop a critical and interdisciplinary conceptual framework for the study of difference which would accord the construct different ontological and epistemological qualities and in turn allow for a potentially more sophisticated and variegated reading of its emergence in social and organisational contexts. To this end, the framework drew in particular from contemporary ideas in social and organisational theory, and cultural studies, using them to develop a non-



essentialist, processual, shifting and political conception of difference. This chapter moves away from these theoretical concerns to consider how they might be investigated in empirical terms. As such, the objective of this fourth chapter is to present and justify the development and execution of the 18-month multi-method research study which was carried out in order to capture some of the empirical dimensions of difference. This chapter will cover issues of broad methodological perspective, site selection and sampling, choice of research methods, the nature of the research process and finally the strategy for analysing the data. In other words, this chapter documents the translation of the previous chapters' theoretical questions and concerns into an appropriate research study.

In order to situate these latter concerns, it is useful to begin this chapter by re-iterating briefly the aims and objectives which this thesis sets out to address and the framework developed to conceptualise them. This is necessary since the aims, objectives and conceptual frame already outlined in this thesis had important implications for the specificities of the design and execution of the research study. Table 4.1 presents the key aim and sub-objectives of this research.

**Table 4.1: Research Aim and Objectives**

<p><b>Research Aim:</b></p> <p>To explore processes of identification and differentiation within an intercultural management setting.</p>
<p><b>Specific Objectives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To examine the role of national culture in accounting for difference in international management settings.</li> <li>• To scrutinise the extent to which difference might be described as an objective category of analysis.</li> <li>• To explore the political nature of processes of identification and differentiation.</li> </ul>

A cursory reading of these aims and objectives, and particularly the registration of the terms 'process' and 'examine/scrutinise/explore', should be enough to indicate that they are underpinned by a set of specific ontological and epistemological propositions. These propositions come of course from the conceptual framework developed in the previous chapter. Specifically I have suggested that rather than studying difference as an objective category of analysis, it might be more fruitfully studied as a social process where the construct emerges through mediated acts of social agency. At the heart of these processes of identification and differentiation lies the concept of representation, that is the production of meaning through language. Taking a broadly post-structuralist approach to representation in language, I suggested that the latter works through the organisation and disorganisation of 'divisions' or 'boundaries' which have the simultaneous capacity to organise and disorganise the various and multiplicitous identities and differences of social actors. Encompassing this focus on language within a wider concern for discourse enabled a political dimension to be added to the conceptual framework. Specifically, this political dimension helps us consider the way in which social actors' 'labourings of divisions' serve to create privileged and marginalised identities and differences within organisational settings.

Such a post-structuralist approach to the study of difference within organisational settings is complex and as such demands a research design which will reflect its complexity. At its most basic, the research study for this project needed to be designed to elicit managerial language and the ways in which its divisions serve to create identities and differences. It needed to be able to capture the discursive practices and contexts which accompanied these linguistic divisions, and to do this at a local level, that is capturing social actors' 'identity work' *in situ* in both spatial and temporal



terms<sup>55</sup>. In short, the complexity of such signficatory processes called for a research design that was sensitive to the social, contextual and political nature of the textual production of identity and difference. In order to make this possible, the objective of the research study was to elicit such social texts within their contexts of production and to re-construct them in such a way that they might be deployed to address the aims and objectives set out in table 4.1. In order to design such a research study, the first consideration was one of broad methodological approach. This is dealt with in the next section.

#### **4.3 Methodological implications of identity and difference as products of language and discourse**

Different research methodologies rest on different assumptions about the social world and the way it should be represented. In contemporary social scientific texts (see, for example, Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Bryman, 1988; Silverman, 1993; Hamilton, 1994; Seale, 1998), ways of representing the social world are frequently classified into two competing methodological camps resting on fundamentally different assumptions. These two camps are variously juxtaposed as positivist or quantitative on the one hand, and interpretivist, naturalist<sup>56</sup> or qualitative on the other. Both these traditions are described as having their own philosophical origins, sets of conventions and research techniques which produce different understandings of the same social phenomena and which are therefore incommensurable. Leaving the problems of this perhaps overextended duality of methodological approach aside<sup>57</sup>, it should be noted that it is

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<sup>55</sup> By this I mean that the research design needed to capture managerial language at the time and in the specific place it was enunciated. It needed to focus on 'real' managers doing 'real' divisions in 'real' time and in 'real' places.

<sup>56</sup> The term 'naturalism' can be applied to both of these camps. In the philosophy of social science the term is frequently used (see, for example, Bhaskar, 1979) to refer to the application of the principles of the natural sciences to the social sciences. It can also, however, be interpreted in qualitative terms to refer to the learning of the culture of the research participants based on the assumption that the social world can only be investigated in its naturally occurring situations.

<sup>57</sup> The difficulty in presenting discussion in terms of a duality of 'positivism versus interpretivism', 'quantitative versus qualitative' is that it serves to homogenise the different kinds of positivism and

not my intention to engage here in an in-depth account and critique of the debate on the relative merits of positivist and interpretivist modes of research. There are two reasons for this. Firstly it has already been carried out in greater depth and in more eminent texts than this. I specifically refer the reader to the writings of Anthony Giddens (1976), Roy Bhaskar (1979) and William Outhwaite (1987) for cogent and insightful accounts of this debate. And secondly because it is not my intention to suggest that *as a rule of thumb* positivism, say, offers a less legitimate and constructive methodology than interpretivism. Both approaches have their supporters and their critics. Rather what makes either of these broad methodological approaches more constructive than the other depends on the broader theoretical framework of the research as well as the particular research objectives being pursued. As such, this section sets out to consider the methodological suitability of broadly articulated positivist and interpretivist approaches in terms of their relationship to my conceptual framework and to the aims and objectives to be addressed from within this framework.

#### **4.3.1 Positivism, difference and the questionnaire-survey**

As noted in chapter two, positivism has been the orthodox methodological approach for the majority of the social scientific disciplines in the post-war period including that of international management research. Given the clearly post-structuralist framework which guides this thesis, there would seem on the face of it to be little point considering positivism as a prospective methodology for the research study. On a metatheoretical level, the ontological and epistemological assumptions which guide positivism are fundamentally and irreconcilably different from those of my preferred reading of post-structuralism. The notion that reality is external to the individual, that it is patterned into enduring and invariant sequences of causes and effects which can be quantified, and that researchers can objectively research these patterns by eliminating bias and

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interpretivism which exist, e.g. logical positivism, positive science, Popperian positivism,



standardising their research procedures (some of the assumptions associated with positivism) all stand in stark contradiction to my theoretical perspective. Rather than focusing on the individual and its relation to an external reality, I focus on the relations between humans through which their subjectivities and therefore their identities and differences are produced discursively. Rather than assuming that reality is fixed and law-like in nature, I look for the changing nature of identities and differences and attempt to interpret the contexts in which they change. Rather than pretending to stand outside my research study, I believe the best way to understand others' subjectivities is to become part of their identity processes. This recognises the fact that my interaction with the participants is as much constitutive of the subject of the research as the interaction between the participants themselves. Leaving these obvious metatheoretical chasms aside, there are specific methodological difficulties with positivism which I would like to highlight, if anything because they provide further sources of criticism of orthodox approaches to the study of difference in IMR. In order to demonstrate these difficulties I will draw upon the ways in which the questionnaire-survey, the privileged method of IMR researchers, have been used in the study of difference.

In order to contextualise these difficulties, it is important to note that they arise as a direct result of the epistemological privilege that positivistically informed studies have consistently assumed for themselves. Rather than presenting a justification of method with regard to the wider theoretical perspective in which it is used, so often a perceived necessity of 'interpretivist' researchers, positivist methodologies establish their credibility through the demonstration of a 'scientific' approach to the application of various research techniques and protocols. The standardisation of research procedure, the elimination of bias, the operationalisation of concepts, the use of experimental and survey designs all form part of positivist research techniques. One of the most

influential schemes of how this scientific credibility should be substantiated methodologically is Popper's (1957) *hypothetico-deductivity*. The hypothetico-deductive method, which characterises the use of the questionnaire survey, is based on a prescribed set of conventions for research which enable 'truths' about social reality to be established in a standardised and universal manner by all social scientists. Accordingly, science proceeds through a process of hypothesising fundamental laws then deducing what kinds of observations will demonstrate the truth or falsity of these hypotheses. The social scientist can thus explain an event by showing that it can be deduced from a general law (theory or generalisation) together with initial conditions or observations which provided the impetus for the study. Silverman (1973) argues that the main consequence of this scheme has been the separation of theory and method where a hypothesis is formulated on the basis of the theory and then quite independently, data (measurable, quantitative) are collected which will test the hypothesis. The construction of hypotheses based on theory and the collection of data to test them are thus regarded as two separate scientific endeavours. It is precisely this separation which has created a myopia among positivistic researchers that their methods are objective to the extent that they (the methods) are above theory and therefore provide a guarantee of true scientific knowledge. Any justification of method in relation to a wider epistemological context, so often the perceived necessity of researchers doing qualitative research as a defence for their enterprises, would seem unnecessary for some positivist researchers. As such, as Silverman (1973) suggests, methodology has come to mean little more than precise statistical techniques for handling quantitative data.

In order to use these statistical techniques, the hypothetico-deductive method conventionally proceeds through the identification and measurement of concepts like identity and difference. Similarities and differences between various populations are inferred through the measurement of various concepts. An interesting aspect of this



measurement lies in the way in which concepts are rendered visible in social analysis such that they can be measured at all. This occurs through the process of operationalisation where these concepts are made operational by constructing a bank of questions or statements to which subjects are required to provide a single response on each item. These questions are generated by the researcher and cannot be altered by the participant required to respond. According to the hypothetico-deductive scheme, the only questions which are valid for positivist researchers are those which can be tested and falsified. Whilst it may be interesting to ask, for example, why managers in intercultural contexts behave in the way they so, or what they think about their 'foreign' colleagues, they cannot be considered valid hypotheses for research since they cannot be observed objectively and are not statistically testable or verifiable.

This methodological approach can be criticised from several perspectives, and I do so using examples of the use of questionnaire surveys in positivist studies of difference in international management. First of all there is the problem of the multitude of meanings which might be construed from any given questionnaire item or statement. Let us take the example of the various meanings which might be attributed to questions such as: "Would your superior show disapproval of a member who regularly arrived late for work by a certain amount of time?"; or, "On average, how often does your superior check with members concerning the quality of their work?"; and even "On average, how often does your superior instruct you on how to increase your job skill?". These questions are taken directly from Tayeb's (1994: 158-159) questionnaire. But what does it mean to 'show disapproval'? What sort of behaviours might be associated with this? Raising an eyebrow? Shouting? Sacking the employee? And what is a certain amount of time? Is it permitted to be late on Fridays rather than Mondays? Equally, what is the 'quality' of a person's work? It may relate to the working conditions in which the employee completes their tasks just as it may relate to the number of defects in a

finished product. And how exactly does a superior 'instruct' his/her employees? By threatening them with various sanctions? By teaching them? Or by commanding them? Any combination of meanings may be construed from these three questions. Therefore to suggest that respondents will understand questions in the same way is problematic. Moreover, such standardised questionnaires typically constrain the content and form of subjects' responses and place limits on the context of understanding and interpretation in which responses are given. This is a consequence of the assumption that standardised questions and responses have common meanings for respondents and that their nature is fixed. This does not correspond to my ontology of difference where meaning is to some degree fluid and created discursively and in context. Positivist questionnaires do not allow consideration of the way in which context helps frame various social phenomena. A further point of criticism here is that the respondents' replies under the conditions of research and what would prevail in everyday social discourse may not be the same thing. As I argued earlier I believe that meanings constantly change in social discourse according to the contingencies of the social domain. As Potter and Wetherell (1987) have cogently illustrated, attitudes are not relatively consistent personal features but locally constructed features of discourse.

A second point for critique which relates to the previous discussion and has also been talked about in chapter two refers to the statistics calculated from research studies and the knowledge which these numbers claim to represent. With regard to a survey among British and Japanese workers Denfeld-Wood (1996), for example, raises the following question: if 65% of British respondents and 50% of Japanese respondents agreed with statement 'individual effort counts for getting ahead', *what would we know?* According to positivistically informed studies, if the sample is large enough then we know that it is statistically significant and if random for a given population, it marks a systematic



difference. But as Denfeld-Wood points out, perhaps a more pertinent question would be *how* is it meaningful? As he writes (1996: 2):

Do we know what behaviour is classified as "individual effort" by all those in both samples? Do we know what "getting ahead" is for all those in each sample? Do we allow for different meanings for "getting ahead" within each country? Do we understand that if half the Japanese agreed, half also disagree- and do we know why? Do we understand why a certain per cent of the combined Japanese and British sample answers the question in the "same way" (...) with only a 15 per cent difference showing cultural variation?

Once 'deconstructed', such statistics raise fundamental questions about how much numbers might claim to represent. They are certainly limited in their claims to represent answers to the type of question that Denfeld-Wood raises. However there is a more fundamental issue at stake here: that of the principle of theoretical sampling from which these statistics are derived. This principle is based first of all on the notion of a *sample* which refers to the selection of a group of similar respondents deemed to be representative of a wider population. The assumed identity of the sample and its wider population mean that the statistical results computed for any sample can be generalised to become applicable to the population as a whole. Secondly, this principle assumes that *any* population measured on *any* variable will produce a *normal* distribution. Thus for any single measurement variable, any individual can be compared to another individual through the means of their relation to the norm. The norms of a test may have to be adjusted to a different population, but the test itself and what it purports to measure is assumed to be outside the social sphere. Thus social spheres are not considered to affect the universal applicability of the measure. The methodological consequence of these positions is that a *large* sample must be chosen which is representative and adequate in number to be amenable to statistical techniques through which comparisons between scores on a variable can be made. No data on an individual mean anything in their own right in such a framework. It is only by comparison with the norm on a single variable that any results can be significant.

According to Easterby-Smith *et. al.* (1991: 128), once a large sample has been found, similarities and differences between groups of people rather than individuals can be determined using statistical tests.

At this point we can mobilise Popper's (1963) judgement of similarity in the workings of the hypothetico-deductive scheme. He argued that researchers using statistical sampling make certain judgements of similarity about the sample in relation to the population it represents. Specifically they assume identity between all the respondents. But how do we know that all the members of a sample are the same or at least similar in the case of both Tayeb and Denfeld-Wood? We do not. The researcher simply assumes this to be the case in order to proceed with a research study. The use of the survey questionnaire thereby reinforces positivism as a science consisting of the registration of empirical invariances between discrete events. The statistical results derived from any study are inherently normative in the sense that the individual has no significance until compared with the norm of a sample. Any form of difference, individuality, uniqueness is thus squeezed out and downplayed as of minor importance. Difference is masked; identity is celebrated. But this is an artificially created identity which serves to reinforce the norms of the time and social space in which the research study was conducted. Politically too, the complexity of the subjectivity and the relations which create it are reduced to numbers. People thus become numbers. The material and emotional experience of selfhood and alterity is lost through its quantification. I doubt whether head counting can provide a political analytic depth on a phenomenon.

In closing this sub-section I would like to emphasise that it has not been my intention to reject outright positivism as an unconstructive methodology *per se*, but to explore



critically its central tenets and methodological protocols with regard to the context of this particular research. Table 4.2 lists the key points of this critical exploration.

**Table 4.2: Criticisms of Positivistic Survey Methodology**

Implications of the use of questionnaire surveys as a positivistic research method
1. Representation of social experience is constrained by researcher's pre-defined categories.
2. Ignores the multiplicitous way in which meaning is construed.
3. Strips phenomena of their contexts.
4. Treats attitudes as consistent and coherent aspects of one's personality.
5. Statistical sampling ignores the sociality of experience.
6. Only large samples are valid: individuals only gain significance in relation to the norms of the sample.
7. Normative frames of phenomena are created: difference is masked.
8. Social norms and stereotypes are reinforced.
9. People are reduced to numbers.
10. Pretensions to neutral observation language ignore its reality-constitutive properties as a social practice.
11. Difference is marked out in some parts, masked in others.

**Source:** *Compiled by the author.*

In light of these criticisms, positivist methodological assumptions and procedures are simply not appropriate for this research project. I need a more suitable methodology which addresses the complex conditions of managers, either in their uniqueness or their commonality. The next sub-section goes on to consider the possibilities of interpretivism.

**4.3.2 Interpretivism and difference**

In looking for a more suitable methodological position, we are immediately invited to the 'other' school of social science (Silverman, 1993: 21): that of interpretivism<sup>58</sup>. Increasing academic interest in interpretivism (Cassell and Symon, 1994) is indicative of the intellectual crisis in the social sciences about its aims and the best way of representing its objects of study. It reflects a changing understanding of what research should focus upon as its area of inquiry and the methodologies for framing it. The first

point to make about interpretivism, as with positivism, is to be cautionary about defining it in terms of the 'quantitative-qualitative' duality which predominates social scientific texts on methodology. Firstly, it is misguided to assume that qualitative research can simply be defined as everything that is not quantitative. As Kirk and Miller (1986: 10) point out:

Qualitative research is an empirical, socially located phenomenon, defined by its own history, not simply a residual grab-bag comprising all things that are "not quantitative".

Secondly, and more importantly, a closer investigation of what is subsumed under the label of qualitative research reveals a plethora of versions of what interpretivist research stands for and consequently a large number of authors espousing predominantly similar, but individually accented accounts of the meaning of qualitative research. Silverman (1993), for example, illustrates and criticises five different versions of the logic of qualitative research by several eminent scholars. Although differently accented, what holds these versions of qualitative research together is a concern to represent the world in different ways to those of an objectivist nature. Thus, whereas positivist techniques are concerned with representing phenomena and relationships between phenomena numerically and establishing truths about them via the collection and testing of numerical data, interpretivist or qualitative techniques are more broadly concerned with *textual and meaning-laden* representations of the world. At once, this basic tenet of interpretivist methodology, that it implicates the interpretation of texts rather the quantification of relationships through statistical testing, seems highly consistent with the post-structuralist framework of chapter three where identity and difference are discursively produced social texts. On a broad ontological and epistemological level, the metatheoretical commitment of interpretivism to text would seem a suitable base for developing a methodology for the research study.

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<sup>58</sup> Again I repeat the point that the use of the label 'interpretivism' subsumes a large number of different variants within its boundaries.



There are however a number of points about interpretivism as a methodology which require some qualification. Just as with positivism, there are certain commitments which ensue from an interpretivist approach to methodology which require some scrutiny if they are to form a suitable methodological basis for the research study. I will focus on three of these: the interpretivist commitment to taking the 'actor's' perspective; the imperative of doing research in 'natural' settings and the purported relationship of the researcher to the researched.

In relation to the first of these, in a seminal article in *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Van Maanen (1979: 520) stated that:

The label qualitative techniques has no precise meaning in any of the social sciences. It is at best an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world.

This quotation from Van Maanen allows us to appropriate the concern of interpretivist research with textual representations of the world in two important directions. Firstly interpretivist approaches are methodologically committed to interpreting the *meanings* of various forms of social action. This contrasts with the positivist commitment to the frequency of certain statistical items as its point of analysis. In attempting to interpret the meanings of social action, interpretivists are committed to taking the actor's point of view, that is to understand phenomena in terms of how the actors or participants themselves interpret and confer meaning upon their own actions. As Giddens (1976) clarifies, the researcher should attempt to draw upon the same sorts of resources as 'laypeople' in making sense of the conduct which it is his/her aim to explain. The practical theorising of laypeople cannot merely be dismissed by the researcher as an obstacle to forms of social scientific understanding of human conduct. Rather the concepts used by the social scientist should be linked to a prior understanding of the concepts used by laypeople in sustaining a meaningful social world. This commitment

to the concepts used by laypeople derives from the exigencies of ethnography which, at one level at least, attempts to understand people in their *milieu* using the concepts which comprise their everyday existence. As Agar (1986: 12) makes clear:

The social research style that emphasises encountering alien worlds and making sense of them is called ethnography, or 'folk description'. Ethnographers set out to show how social action in one world makes sense from the point of view of another.

Thus the researcher endeavours to take on the perspective of the subject through relations in which the empathy with or *Verstehen* of the Other is pivotal to the interpretation of their subjectivities (Smircich, 1983). This type of understanding implicates a double hermeneutic: the understanding through which people make sense of their own and others' conduct and practices, and also the understanding which the researcher imposes on these accounts or practices so produced. It is however a double hermeneutic which misses one key area of investigation which is of relevance to my theoretical framework: that of power relations. The interpretivist approach in its broadest sense does not recognise the way in which power relations and value judgements shape the concepts used by both laypeople and researchers as well as the relationship between the researcher and the researched in terms of the authorial role of the former. In simple terms an interpretivist approach does not adequately engage with the power relations inherent in the sustenance of a meaningful social world among laypeople. Nor does it acknowledge that the role of the researcher/ethnographer is based on a power relation.

This is not a new criticism. It is one frequently made of the interpretivist paradigm, notably by radical humanists who accuse interpretivists of reinforcing the status quo by ignoring the exercise of power and the propagation of hierarchies and inequalities in the social settings which they survey. By ignoring these properties of social reality, it is not possible to change them for the betterment of the participants with whom the researcher



engages. Within the ethnographic tradition too, criticism has been levelled against the interpretivist pretension to a form of descriptive neutrality (Hammersley, 1992). Description is always a selective activity, taking certain phenomena to be relevant and registering those phenomena as indicative of certain categories. This descriptive selectivity depends on the researcher's frame of reference and as such is deeply political. More than this, though, ethnographies are texts which adopt the writerly conventions of achieving authorial voice and persuasive effect. Clifford and Marcus (1986), in their aptly entitled book *Writing Culture: The Politics and Poetics of Ethnography*, cogently illustrate the way in which ethnographers and anthropologists make selective use of individual respondents' points of view, adopt a panoramic perspective on simultaneous happenings and use the techniques of narrative construction to persuade the reader of the authenticity of their accounts.

The second methodological imperative worthy of survey is interpretivism's commitment to gathering 'naturally' occurring data. According to Marshall and Rossman (1989: 23) qualitative research:

(...) assumes that systematic inquiry must occur in a natural setting rather than an artificially constrained one such as an experiment.

By collecting data in natural settings (rather than experimental ones) it is argued that a more accurate, in-depth and *authentic* description of any given phenomenon is possible. This authenticity is to be gained by studying phenomena in the settings in which they occur. Silverman (1993) argues that the differentiation of 'natural' and 'artificial' settings is a spurious polarity where it is unclear what constitutes the difference between the two. One could interpret my enterprise of attempting to collect data from management meetings as taking place in a 'naturally occurring' setting since these meetings would continue to take place whether I was present or not. However it is equally plausible to consider the research setting for this study (see next section 4.4) as

artificial. The management meeting itself could be considered a highly artificial and constructed setting in the sense that it was purposively initiated by the two companies to deal with problems of mutual concern. Conceptualised as sociopolitically configured texts, the meetings are not natural occurrences but politically motivated encounters.

The third methodological commitment of interpretivist research, which has already been touched upon in the previous two, is the re-conceptualisation of the relationship between the researcher and the researched. In positivistically informed research, the researcher is considered to be detached from the research study, able to describe 'neutrally' the phenomena which he/she observes. The researched is thought to respond passively to the researcher. In interpretivist research all methodological protocols and practices are regarded as highly subjective enterprises involving the interpretation rather than neutral description of the researcher. Rather than attempting to embrace the strategy of objective representation, it is suggested that researchers recognise their own subjective input into interpretations of data and use it to enhance the quality and relevance of the research that is conducted. As Giddens proposes (1976: preface):

*Anyone who recognises that self-reflection, as mediated linguistically, is integral to the characterisation of human social conduct, must acknowledge that such holds also for his own activities as a social analyst.*

The relationship is thus conceptualised as a social interaction (Silverman, 1993) between the researcher and the researched, where the former is recognised as part of the research process rather than a distraction from it, and the latter as an active participant shaping the course of the research rather than simply responding to the researcher's cues.

In this sub-section I have attempted to focus discussion on three key methodological commitments which emanate from an interpretivist approach to research, namely the commitment to taking the participant's point of view, the meaning of 'natural' research



settings and the relationship of the researcher to the researched. The first two of these commitments I regard as problematic. By exclusively assuming the participant's point of view, first of all, the researcher is ignoring the power relations at work in the variety of relationships to be found in the research setting. Ultimately the researcher retains the power inherent in his/her act of authorship. Secondly the polarity of artificial versus natural research settings is spurious since any research setting could be regarded as artificial to a greater or less extent. Despite these problems, a *broadly* qualitative methodology would seem appropriate for the type of approach which I am trying to develop. At a meta-theoretical level it is based on the notion of textual representation where the researcher plays the role of interpretant and as such, this makes it entirely suitable for the study with some further appropriations to take account of the preceding criticisms. Specifically the interpretivist position can be appropriated by treating textual representations as configurations of discourse and subjecting them to a 'critical' form of interpretation, the details of which can be found in section 4.7. As such I took the decision to follow the contours of a broadly interpretivist methodological approach to the research study, thus enabling me to respond to Munro's (1997: 17) concern to see 'knowledge' of identities and difference as:

(...) already widely distributed in diverse social practices that are being practised daily in order to create and iterate different 'ways of seeing'. And it is this simultaneous *division of labour* over knowing, which not only necessitates a grounded study of the labour of divisions, but (...) gives its study particular interest.

In the following section, I turn my attention to the choice of a site for such a 'grounded study' of the labour of divisions.

## **4.4 Site selection and sampling**

This section gives details of the chosen research site and the sample of participants studied during the empirical investigation. It is important to note from the outset that potentially relevant sites for the research study were chosen before the participants themselves. The pragmatic reason for this was that by first choosing a location for the research, I then had a clearer idea of the sets of discursive relations that it would be feasible to sample and study. Ultimately though, the choice of research site was decided by the question of access.

### **4.4.1 Searching for a research location**

Above all, the site for the research study had, in simple terms, to reflect the broad context of 'international management' which formed the initial substantive interest of this research. I was looking for an organisation or organisations that dealt with foreign marketplaces and whose managers did business on a regular basis with 'foreign' colleagues. The managers therefore had to have different nationalities in order to reflect the common research practice of the studies which I reviewed in chapter two. Rather than deal with any number and any nationality, it was my wish to restrict the study to two: 'British' or perhaps that should/could be 'Scottish,' and either 'German' preferably or 'French'<sup>59</sup>. The choice of the latter two nationalities was based on my ability to speak both these languages more or less fluently and my wish to apply these skills in my doctoral research. I was therefore looking ideally for a British/Scottish organisation which had links with Germany or France.

Two initial considerations constrained the search for a research location. Firstly, for financial and logistical reasons, I restricted the search to companies located in Scotland

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<sup>59</sup> There is a specific reason for the inverted comma. I use the labels British, French and German in inverted commas provisionally in order to allow the space for participants to define their own identities,



and specifically in the Central Belt in which lies most of Scotland's economic base. Secondly the choice of site depended on the length of time for which I could enjoy access. I wished to spend a sustained amount of time developing relationships with the participants of my study in order that I could enrich the quality of my data by taking a processual and more particularly a 'longitudinal'<sup>60</sup> approach to the research study. I felt that this would enable me to examine more thoroughly the temporal aspects of the production of identity and difference. In total the search for an appropriate organisation given these parameters took some six months and proved one of the most difficult parts of the research process.

My initial ideas on potential locations were quite disparate. I enjoy drinking whisky and thought that a study in the whisky industry would somehow motivate me to gather more detailed data. I had worked in a medium-sized electronics company selling printed circuit boards to various European market sectors and thought that this experience would prove invaluable in understanding the 'international' dynamics of a study in the electronics sector. I knew that whisky and electronics were two of Scotland's most important export sectors and decided to investigate further Scotland's export profile. My logic was that the most export-oriented sectors would furnish me with the most potential leads given the 'international' contexts in which they are involved. At that time, whisky was still Scotland's leading export and so I followed this trail. Having liaised with the Scotch Whisky Association in London, I acquired their membership list of 41 distillers and subsequently contacted the eleven most promising by letter. These eleven exported at least one of their whiskies to either France or Germany and were for the most part leading brand names. My intention was to conduct

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perhaps drawing upon these signifiers. Pragmatically, they provided me however with a way of narrowing down the search for research subjects.

<sup>60</sup> By longitudinal I am marking my concern to carry out a research study over an extended period of time. As it transpired the appellation of my study as longitudinal does not denote that I spent a long and

my research study in the sales or marketing departments of these distillers. It transpired that the five organisations who were at least interested in my study could not assist me because their marketing had been contracted out to distributors based in Germany with whom they had very little contact other than at board level once a year to which it was unlikely that I would gain access. Although I pursued this more vigorously through personal contacts in the whisky industry, even they could not help me find a research location.

Moving on from these disappointing results, I then decided to change my strategy from a single to a multi-sectoral focus. I decided to build up a list of companies which exported to Germany regardless of the sectors in which they operated. Using publically available information on Scotland's exporting companies, I drew up a list of twelve prospective organisations based in Scotland who exported to Germany. I telephoned each of them to confirm appropriate contact names and sent out a two-page letter to each of them describing my research. Again the results were disappointing with few showing interest in the research either because they were too busy, thought it of little practical use to them or 'had German speakers in their ranks and therefore didn't have any problems at home or abroad because they got everything translated anyway'.

I then moved on to the government agency Scottish Enterprise which had enjoyed significant press coverage at this time. Having established that Scottish Enterprise delivered targeted assistance with exporting, interfirm linkages and foreign direct investment through Scottish Trade International and Locate in Scotland, I arranged a meeting with the director of the latter organisation to discuss my research. He liked my ideas and granted me access to their offices in Munich and Düsseldorf for a study period of three to four months. This was reduced to two months. Then six weeks. In

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uninterrupted amount of time with the organisations; in reality I was in and out of the organisations for a period of 18 months. As such longitudinal merely denotes the overall time I spent in the 'field'.



the end we settled on two months in Munich and a month in Düsseldorf where it was my intention to follow round the managers in these offices with a view to doing an ethnography of communication and tape-recording their meetings with selected German clients. Having agreed this some six weeks before my departure I made suitable arrangements: gave notice on my flat, notified my department and prepared travel plans. Becoming increasingly nervous that I had not heard anything from my contact at Scottish Trade International during this period, it eventually took a letter from my supervisor to ascertain from his PA that the plans for my project had been shelved. Having spent four months on the exercise of finding a research site, this came as a blow to me. It was hugely demoralising.

In the next two months I followed up once again the twelve contacts on my list of exporters and eventually one of the companies noted interest in my study: Bigtruck<sup>61</sup>, a truck manufacturer based in Central Scotland. The Human Resource Manager at Bigtruck, to whom I had been directed after a few phone calls with one of the Managing Directors, was at that time preparing some in-house training on culture and perception. Luckily for me, he thought that my study would be particularly useful for developing some form of training for the managers who dealt directly with 'foreign' customers and suppliers. I was therefore granted complete access to the organisation and allowed to fine-tune my research design within the exigencies of this site. In the end then, I had no other choice of research site but this one. Ultimately this made the decision on site selection for me. I cannot therefore claim to have made some form of 'most appropriate choice' among a series of options. In retrospect, however, I could not have selected a better site for my research had this been possible. The pragmatics of my situation thus proved a double-edged sword.

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<sup>61</sup> I have used this pseudonym to protect, as far as possible, the identity of the organisation.

The extended description of the process and logic of site selection is intentional. As one of the most difficult emotional and professional experiences of the entire research process, I felt that I wanted to detail within reason the various avenues I went down to find a suitable site. In presenting this description I have slightly pasteurised this six-month process and left out details of other leads which I followed. Despite this I hope the reader has an indication of the vicissitudes of this process. Too often texts on methodology do not emphasise the practical circumstances and pragmatic decisions which researchers face in the process of selecting a site. Usually these pragmatic considerations are reserved for other accounts of the research process such as research methods chosen, justification of the number of interviews chosen or type of data gathered if they are mentioned at all. In short, the point I am making is that the problem of access proved a major difficulty for my research, one which could have entailed a fundamental re-think of the thesis. Although not an unrecoverable situation by any means, it would have posed a major challenge to re-orientate substantially my research, not only in terms of the time frame of the doctoral process, but more importantly in terms of the considerable intellectual and emotional investment I had made in the research process to that point. Having outlined the process of finding a site, the next sub-section goes on to describe its suitability for my research study.

#### **4.4.2 The research site**

Although I nominated Bigtruck as the research location, this does not adequately reflect the site where the texts I wished to sample were produced. Specifically my site represented what can be labelled an '*interfirm linkage*' (Raines *et. al.*, 1994) between Bigtruck and its German partner Bergbau GmbH<sup>62</sup>. A little background information will help situate this linkage. The main activity of Bigtruck is the production, sale and service support of various types of truck and digger for use in mining operations.

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<sup>62</sup> Again this is a pseudonym used to protect the identity of the German organisation.



Established in 1950 and owned since the late 1980s by a large American engineering corporation, the recent history of the company has been characterised by attempts to grow the business by means of new product lines and strategic alliances. This has involved forging relationships with foreign distributors in attempts to increase export sales for their products. That only 13.4% of Bigtruck's production was sold in the UK in 1996 demonstrates the fact that Bigtruck is vitally dependent on exports to its foreign markets. One of these 'alliances' was with a German company called Bergbau GmbH, again a subsidiary of a larger German organisation which counts as one of Germany's oldest engineering firms, established in 1876. Based in Dortmund in the Ruhr area of northern Germany, the company specialises in the field of earthmoving and materials handling equipment. Like Bigtruck, it works through a global distributor network thus making exports a vital part of its business. In 1996, for example, Bergbau total sales amount to DM 1.142 billion, and 60% of these were exports.

Brief descriptions aside, I would like to return here to the point made earlier about interfirm linkages. The agreement between Bigtruck and Bergbau could be represented by various signifiers, be it strategic alliance, marketing agreement or even non-equity joint-venture. In this language game I prefer the term interfirm linkage because of its interactive overtones and its suitability for describing the type of relationship between Bigtruck and Bergbau. I initially came across this term in Raines *et. al.*'s (1994) study for the Scottish Office which examined such linkages between Scottish-based firms and their counterparts in other areas of Western Europe. According to the authors, the term covers a variety of different forms of business cooperation which share three common features. These common features distinguish interfirm linkages from both one-off export transactions and ownership business strategies such as acquisitions and stand as follows (Raines *et. al.*, 1994: I):

- International co-operation involves a *network* of at least two firms which agree to cooperate for the purpose of common cross-border business activities.
- Although linked within a network, participating firms remain *independent agents*, at least when initially taking part.
- Lastly, co-operation requires the *sustained coordination of activities* through the network over a series of repeated transactions or for a single, prolonged transaction.

The Bigtruck/Bergbau relationship exhibited all these characteristics. They co-operated together in a network, but remained independent agents while practising sustained business activities together. It must be noted however that the nature of the agreement fundamentally changed during the course of my research with the company<sup>63</sup>. At the outset though this definition was entirely pertinent. Specifically the 'sustained business activities' in this interfirm link took the form of an agreement on the production and sale of trucks. According to the agreement signed by the two companies in 1993, Bigtruck manufactures dumptrucks for Bergbau which it badges with the Bergbau logo for re-sale. Bigtruck therefore makes dump trucks as OEM products on behalf of Bergbau. Having manufactured the trucks, Bigtruck then ships them directly to Bergbau's customers. The main artery for the conduct of these business activities were the service support and warranty meetings which were conceived to solve any difficulties in the manufacture, sale and support of the Bigtruck manufactured trucks. Ultimately it was their meetings which provided the site for my research study.

This interfirm linkage formed an ideal site for my empirical investigation of difference. It involved a Scottish and a German-based company, the Scottish based company was located in the Central Belt and I gained full access to the organisations for an extended amount of time (18 months). More than this though, there are two other important points which made this research site pertinent. Firstly the linkage was based on similarities and differences, the substantive themes of this thesis. Both companies are specialists in earthmoving equipment, are of similar size and financial stature and are

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<sup>63</sup> By the end of my 18-month period researching the companies, Bigtruck had bought Bergbau from its German owners.



important players in various international markets. They differ, however, in terms of their product ranges, technological capabilities and key export markets. It is these differences which provided the organisational rationale for the agreement. The second point is that the interfirm linkage took form and continues to take form through the intercultural interactions of its managers, again the very focus of this study. In this light, it can be suggested that it is not organisations as hard empirical facts that form relationships with one another, but the people who create those organisations. In the next two sub-sections, I describe the criteria and ultimate choice of the particular sets of relationships and concomitant intercultural interactions which provided the texts for interpretation and critique of this thesis.

#### **4.4.3 Theoretical sampling *in situ***

One of the key discussion points in section 4.3.1 was the principle of theoretical sampling. My particular concern was not with the idea of sampling *per se*, for it comprises an important part of this research study, but with the way in which it is conceptualised in positivist research. All forms of empirical research involve elements of sampling to the extent that they implicate a choice of appropriate participants. At the heart of these sampling choices are the very issues of similarity and difference which form the key concern of this thesis. Sampling is essentially about the judgement of similarity and difference between potential research participants. This judgement is, however, based on fundamentally different assumptions depending on one's methodology which in turn produce fundamentally different propositions about the nature and relevance of potential samples.

To re-iterate briefly, the process of statistical sampling begins by defining a population of interest for the research from which various 'units of analysis' might be defined. These units of analysis provide potential sampling frames from which, using techniques

such as stratified or cluster sampling, the eventual sample of participants is chosen. The statistical results computed for this random sample are then generalised to become applicable to the population as a whole and stand as law-like relationships between the variables tested in the study. At first sight this approach seems nothing less than a considered and organised manner in which to find participants for one's study. A researcher from any theoretical position should be able to justify his/her choice of participants. The problem is more fundamental than this. From this perspective, only large numbers of people can be chosen for the purposes of sampling in order that the results are amenable to statistical techniques through which comparisons between scores on a particular variable can be measured. No data on an individual means anything in its own right in such a framework. Individuality has no meaning in itself, only in relation to the norms of the sample. The only *valid* samples are therefore those which contain large numbers of participants who are assumed to be identical in nature. As already mentioned, this form of sampling produces normative accounts of social phenomena which serve to squeeze out any form of difference. It creates artificial identities by assuming the identity of the people who comprise the sample.

Using a broadly interpretivist methodology, such statistical sampling is not appropriate since the latter renders it possible to explain the uniqueness of every individual in terms of their relation through signification to positions in discourse. The validity of that explanation does not depend on the assumption of the identity of that person with another on any variable because the meanings which mediate one's construction and experience of that discursive position are unique. As such:

(...) the information derived from any participant is valid because that account is a product (albeit complex) of the social domain. If this domain is analysed in its specificity, the resultant interpretation will be valid without the support of statistical samples; that is, without evidence that whole groups do the same thing. (Hollway, 1982: 183)



Importantly though, I am not sampling 'individuals' or 'participants', however they may be conceptualised methodologically. I am sampling *relations* between participants and the texts which are thereof produced; relations in their complexity and in their contexts. In contrast to positivistically conceptualised sampling, my sampling approach is based on the belief that *any* individual or collective experience within an organisational context is meaningful as it is produced through signification within a specific social domain. In theory then, the contribution of any individual, group of individuals or 'discursive community' within the interfirm linkage was valid and potentially of use in this study. Any text, be it an interview or a transcript of a meeting, could have afforded material for analysis in light of its production within discursive processes.

In practice, however, the choice of a suitable sample for the research was more difficult. In short, the exigencies of the research site presented certain restrictions on the possibilities for sampling these relations. It was only after two months of initial fieldwork in the Scottish organisation that I was able to identify what I perceived as significant differences in the potential richness of a variety of samples. Since the agreement between the two companies had been in place for three years when I started conducting my fieldwork, the relationships necessary to carry out the various functions of the business successfully had already been established. Although nominally the agreement with Bergbau was a matter for all the employees in the organisation, in practice, only a certain number of them were involved in the actual activity of realising the agreement. This restricted the selection of a sample to a few key relationships which took the form, for example, of either a one-to-one relationship between a Scottish and a German manager who had similar job descriptions or a group of managers from both companies who met regularly to sort out certain strategic issues in the ongoing relationship.

What made some texts potentially richer than others depended *inter alia* on the number of opposite numbers in Dortmund with whom the Scots had contact, the frequency of contact with these colleagues, and the nature and relative importance of the contact as perceived by the Scottish employees. More than this though, I found that the Bigtruck employees did not understand their actions, relations and subjective experience of the interfirm linkage either in the same ways or to the same extent. Having talked to all the employees involved in the day-to-day running of the agreement during this initial period, I found considerable differences in the degree and ways in which they reflected upon their relations with their German counterparts. Moreover, I found different degrees of interest in my study amongst them. Both the interpretation of the reflexive capacities and degrees of interest of the Bigtruck employees were subjective judgements on my part. To me what they demonstrated was a potential willingness to participate fully and reflect critically and in-depth on the issues in my study. I judged the texts which I could elicit from those participants with high levels of reflection and interest as potentially the most rich for me. The data afforded by someone who both experiences and expresses a multiplicity of meanings in their subjective experience affords rich data which is particularly appropriate for a qualitative researcher. The sets of relations which I ultimately sampled are described in the next sub-section.

#### **4.4.4 Bigtruck's product assurance managers and Bergbau's service and warranty managers**

The set of relations I chose involved five managers, two from Bigtruck and three from Bergbau. Sometimes the exact number of managers involved in this set of relations changed for various reasons at different points in time. The five managers chosen were responsible on a permanent basis for the areas of product assurance and service. This provided me with a 'stable' set of participants whose practices and relations could be explored over an extended period of time and with whom I could attempt to develop a



good rapport. In order to protect their identities I have attributed pseudonyms to the participants. Both the Bigtruck managers worked in the product assurance department. Pete was the Director of the department and Cameron the Field Service Manager. The product assurance department was responsible for all matters relating to after-sales service. The latter involves the provision of technical and after-sales support for trucks in use in the field as well as the processing and payment/refusal of warranty claims for any problems with these trucks. In contrast to Bigtruck, service support and warranty are separated into two departments in Bergbau with different managers and staff. Dieter and Hans are responsible for service support issues, with Dieter the General Service manager and Hans one of Dieter's delegated Service Managers. The third Bergbau employee involved in the study is Vera who negotiated all the warranty claims in the Bigtruck/Bergbau partnership. Vera was not in charge of the warranty department, but the administrator delegated to deal with all Bigtruck claims. As such the sample size was five; four male and one female; all white; ranging in ages from late twenties to early sixties; mixture of mid-level managerial and administrative positions; all with engineering backgrounds apart from Vera.

Having mentioned briefly each of the participants and the areas of the companies focused upon, I now describe the nature and context of the interactions between them. Given the large number of trucks which Bigtruck manufacture for Bergbau, it is inevitable that a considerable level of product support will be needed and a large number of warranty claims dealt with as faults and breakdowns occur. These product support and warranty issues were the exclusive concern of my participants. In order to deal with them, the five managers in the study met on a quarterly basis alternately in Germany and Scotland. Two meetings would be held quarterly; one for service issues and one for warranty claims. These usually took place on consecutive days. In the subsequent periods they kept in contact via phone and fax, but not by E-mail,

technology which neither company possessed at the time. These meetings thus represented the focal point for the relations between the five managers. It is the interactions and relations principally enacted in these meetings which form the textual samples for this research study. In this next section I go on to outline the particular methods, or combination of methods chosen to elicit these texts and their contexts.

#### **4.5 Research Methods**

So far in this chapter I have outlined the broad methodological approach used to conceive the research study for this thesis, as well the choice of research location and sample participants. In short, the research study involved the participation of five managers working for two organisations, one based in Scotland, one in Germany and was approached from a broadly interpretivist perspective. In this section I outline and justify the research methods chosen to elicit the textual and contextual data which I required. It should be noted from the outset that the research study itself involved the use of *multiple methods*. As will be argued, each of the methods reviewed in this section had a differential ability to shed light on the issues which concern this thesis. As such it was decided to use them in combination in order to complete a fuller, though no less partial, picture of the interactions of the participants. Bearing this in mind, I begin with a quotation from Hartley (1994: 208) who asserts that:

There is nothing about a method *per se* which makes it weak or strong. The argument about the method depends on two factors. First, the relationship between theory and method, and, second, how the researcher attends to the potential weaknesses of the method.

The combination of research methods for this study depended first of all on the exigencies of the theoretical framework in which they were to be utilised. To re-iterate, the texts which I wish to elicit are produced through complex signifiatory processes which call for methods which are capable of being sensitive to and capturing the socio-political, relational and contextual aspects of the managers' talk. An appropriate



method is one which allows the relational properties of the texts to be interpreted critically within the contexts in which they were produced i.e. relations in their complexity and context. Secondly, research techniques have a differential ability to shed light on this theoretical framework thus necessitating a close examination of the strengths and weaknesses of each method. In developing this discussion, I focus on four main techniques frequently used in qualitatively oriented studies as suggested by Silverman (1993): observation; transcription; interviewing; and the collection of documents and other materials. This discussion is largely theoretical and contains only brief commentary on what I actually did. Details of how these methods were combined and utilised *in situ* are contained in section 4.6.

#### **4.5.1 Observation**

As a research method, observation and in particular participant observation derive from the discipline of anthropology and the shift by social and cultural anthropologists in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries towards collecting data *firsthand* (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994: 249). The documentation of the 'everyday social life' of a culture by these anthropologists traditionally led to the production of ethnographies, or conceptually derived descriptions of the culture of a particular group of people. Sociological work based on such ethnographic method is usually assumed to originate in the 1920s (Silverman, 1993: 32) through the work of the 'Chicago School' which concerned itself with the sociology of various aspects of urban life. Against this historical background, participant observation has been a preferred means of experiencing and recording ongoing events in more contemporary social and organisational settings (Waddington, 1994). According to Becker (1970: 398), the participant observer:

(...) gathers data by participating in the daily life of the group or organization he studies. He watches the people he is studying to see what situations they ordinarily meet and how they behave in them. He enters into conversation with

some or all of the participants in these situations and discovers their interpretations of the events he has observed.

The validity of participant observation derives from 'being there', that is being in the presence of others on an ongoing basis. The aim of participant observation is to empathise with a group of people by getting involved in the life of a social setting. The researcher notes what is going on and takes part as a responsible agent in the actions of the participants (Lindlof, 1995: 135). What the researcher ends up with as data are descriptions of the participants' actions and the researcher's actions individually, and also of how each accounts for the other's presence.

Although I am not principally interested in studying the social setting of a group of people *per se* (rather, I am interested in the *relations* between people in specific social settings), observational methods afford several distinct perspectives for this research study. These perspectives are important to my overall theoretical framework. The most obvious is that by being *in situ*, I will have direct access to the meetings and thus the managers talking to each other. Other methods such as individual interviews, surveys or focus groups do not concern themselves with what participants *actually* do. Rather they elicit participants' perceptions of what they *think* they do. This will allow me to tape-record the actual discursive practices which form the bedrock of the identity texts, rather than post-rationalised accounts of the textual process. Secondly, participant observation allows the contexts in which these texts were produced to be attended to through the use of fieldnotes (Burgess, 1984). This enables me to consider the wider social and historical contexts which shape the identities and differences created through talk. The fieldnotes provide descriptions of the 'mundane' details of the meetings which help us to interpret what is going on in a particular context and to provide pointers to other layers of meaning. As Geertz (1973: 10) purports, cultural knowledge is inseparable from the context in which it was created. Thirdly, participant observation



furnishes the possibility of taking a processual and longitudinal perspective on the identities and differences constructed by the managers. Such a perspective is vital for an understanding of how these identities and differences develop and change over time and how this occurs through an interlocking series of events. Finally observational methods provide the basis for some flexibility in my research programme (Bryman, 1988: 61-66) which would allow me to be sensitive to the exigencies of the research site and to deal fruitfully with issues which had not previously been expected. Although it is never possible to avoid the frames of reference through which we create our phenomena of study, this flexibility promotes a sensibility to different and sometimes contradictory reference frames from our own. This stands in contrast to the imposition of prior and possibly inappropriate frames of reference thrust onto participants by structured interviews or structured observational methods for example.

This latter concern with the imposition of frames of reference points to one of the key discussion points in observational methods: the position occupied by the researcher in the social setting. Lindlof (1995: 140) amusingly explains that the belief that a researcher can unproblematically be a 'fly on a wall' in a social setting is naive to the extent that even a fly on the wall has a role to play. Like the fly, the researcher will have a role in a social setting as a simple consequence of his/her presence in the *milieu*. Again we meet here the idea of identities and differences as central to my particular research endeavour, for roles are inextricably linked to the identity portrayed by the researcher *in situ*. On this point, Walsh (1998: 221) remarks that:

Observation, inquiry and data collection depend upon the observer gaining access to the appropriate field and establishing good working relations with the people in it. They need to be relationships that are able to generate the data the researcher requires. The identity that the observer assumes determines the success of this.

In finding signifiers for the researcher's identity, it is commonplace to conceive of research roles in terms of typologies based on various continua. Schwartz and Schwartz

(1955), for example, distinguished between the 'passive' participant observer who tries to operate as anonymously as possible in a social setting permits and the 'active' participant who attempts to integrate into the group of people under investigation. One of the most commonly used typologies in contemporary methodology is Gold's (1958) four master roles which appropriated the work of Schwartz and Schwartz. These roles can be described briefly as follows:

- **Complete participant:** the researcher is a fully functioning member of the social setting, but is not known by others to be acting as a researcher. The researcher thus operates covertly concealing any intention to observe the setting.
- **Participant as observer:** the researcher enters the field with an openly acknowledged investigative purpose, but is able to study from the vantage point of one or more positions within the setting. The researcher thus forms relationships and participates in activities but makes no secret of an intention to observe events.
- **Observer as participant:** in this role, participating pivots from a central position of observing. Observation becomes primary and the researcher maintains only superficial contact with the people in the social setting.
- **Complete observer:** the researcher 'just watches' in this role. He/she stands back from the setting, attempting to make him/herself almost invisible to the participants.

Gold's typology is primarily based on the covert-overt distinction where each role prescribes the extent to which the researcher should conceal his/her identity. This issue of concealment has been considered of prime concern when using observational because of the issue of reactivity (Webb *et. al.*, 1966). Reactivity refers to the possible effects the researcher's presence may have on the behaviour of the participants in their social settings. The issue of 'reactivity' seems to reflect the concerns mooted above all by positivist researchers that the relatively intimate approach implicated by observation invites the possibility that the researcher's presence may have an impact on the reality he or she is observing. Accordingly, people are likely to react to the observer being present by engaging in untypical or extreme forms of behaviour. My own experience suggests that any exhibitionist or unusual forms of behaviour excited by my arrival tended to disappear progressively the longer I remained in the research setting. Apart



from anything else the managers in my study had so little time to deal with their own issues during meetings and thus consider their own positions and identities that they were never particularly concerned with my presence over the longer term. They simply got on with their jobs and for the most part, left me in peace observing away.

Leaving the experience of the field aside, the main strength of the complete participant role in Gold's typology is assumed to lie in the participant's ignorance of the researcher's role which should allow the latter to access more 'real' and more 'authentic' data from the former. In this case the researcher's 'difference' is regarded as a liability which could affect the reliability and authenticity of the research. Such a role allows the researcher to use his/her process of identity creation to understand behaviour in a 'natural setting' by forming relationships and thus creating identity texts together with the 'Other'. In this sense it holds a certain promise for 'getting inside' the subjectivity of communicative action. As Lindlof (1995: 142) suggests:

(...) there is no better path to knowing the feelings, predicaments, and contradictions of the "other" than to be with the other in an authentic relationship.(...) Once inside, the researcher will often become involved in situations not usually available to outsiders. Private information is revealed because only a private relationship is assumed.

At once, the role of complete participant raises questions. What is an authentic relationship? Can you ever know the feelings and predicaments of the Other? As well as obvious questions, the method has obvious drawbacks. Firstly, the researcher's freedom of movement and ability to tailor specific relations with organisational members becomes significantly curtailed. The researcher's movements are restricted to a particular discursive space and his/her choice of research method such as interviewing limited. This is particularly restrictive during the initial stages of research where the researcher may wish to tailor the research strategy to the exigencies of the research site. Secondly it may not be possible to conceal the researcher's identity at all times. The *Angst* of being uncovered is omnipresent.

The influence of Gold's typology lies in its simplicity. However it is also in its simplicity that its drawbacks lie. The overt-covert distinction splits the researcher into a participant role which interacts with members and an observer role that gathers data. But even our presence in the research setting is still a form of participation. Presence *is* engagement. We can never therefore just observe. This simplistic duality masks the way in which, as human beings, we are always being open and honest about some things whilst simultaneously concealing others. Our identities as researchers are always a matter of foregrounding some signifiers at the expense and masking of others. To suggest that adopting a role is simply a matter of choosing on a scale of openness or participation seems spurious on two counts. Firstly it is not possible to pick and choose level of involvement and concealment from a type of menu. As I document in the next section, I was constantly constructing and reconstructing different identities for myself over the 18 month research period. The researcher's identity will change regularly just as all relationships change. Secondly the broadly defined contours of these roles neither give enough detail nor direction on their exigencies nor adequately outline their multiplicitous, multifaceted and changing natures. As a consequence they seem non-descript and vacuous.

In discussing roles for the researcher, the issue at stake is not whether to conceal one's intention from participants, nor to speculate on the subsequent authenticity of the participants' behaviour. Rather it is an issue of discourse and how we researchers 'write' our identities and differences textually (Clifford and Marcus, 1986). The way in which the researcher describes the 'Other', reflects on the nature of membership within a specific social setting and ultimately experiences and then describes the 'culture' under investigation is not dependent on a role but on a discursive construction of Self and Other. And why is this? Simply because all research is a form of participant



observation since we cannot study the social world without becoming part of it. As Bogdan and Taylor (1975: 15) point out, observation involves *social interaction* between the researcher and the participant and as such, always involves the creation of a discursive text through these relations.

The objective of the preceding discussion was to explore and critique some of the key issues subsumed under the labels of observation and ethnography. I should mention here that it was not possible to carry out a full ethnography within my research setting for practical reasons, despite its potentially insightful nature. Despite this, the merits of the ethnographic tool of participant observation provided me with a way for capturing the processes by and contexts in which the managers' texts were produced and as well as a flexible tool for adjusting my exact research strategy to the exigencies of the research site. In capturing this context two key points must be borne in mind. Firstly that the notion of a role for me as a researcher is somewhat spurious. My participants knew from the outset what I was doing in the organisation. This was determined by my gatekeeper who wanted all Bigtruck employees to interact with and assist me in the study. I was an observer at every meeting, but did not actually conduct any of the ongoing business. I was still however a participant in as far as my simple presence there created this role. Secondly the descriptions I made of the contexts in which the identity texts were produced were never simple and accurate reflections based on a strong 'empathy' with the participants and the social setting. Rather they are texts written from my discursive perspective and my discursive identity. Ultimately this thesis can lay claim to be at best an insightful piece of fiction. I thus reject the notion that I could ever fully understand the complexity of the context but hope that my presence will offer more richness to my picture than other methods and research studies might, given its 'closeness' to the data. This closeness should help me provide thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of these contexts and give the reader an in-depth

background to the talk, for it is in this depth that talk is rendered most meaningful. Observational methods were therefore appropriate for my research and were subsequently used in the empirical study itself. I now move on to consider the usefulness of interviewing techniques for my study.

#### **4.5.2 Interviewing**

The interview is the most widely used method in qualitative research (King, 1994; Seale, 1998). It is deemed to be a highly flexible method which can be used almost anywhere and which is capable of generating detailed data (King, 1994: 14). It is a method which people feel comfortable with, knowing roughly what is expected of them in terms of response. It is considered more economical than observational methods since the interviewee can account for a wide range of situations that he or she has observed, thus acting as the 'eyes and ears' of the researcher (Seale, 1998: 202). However, like all research methods, any claims of flexibility and profundity of data to be derived from interview techniques depend on the relationship of that method to the theoretical perspective in which it is utilised. There are different types of interviews which are conventionally used in different types of research study. These types of interview are variously labelled structured, semi-structured and unstructured. As these signifiers imply, the difference between them lies in the degree of structure imposed on the interview by the researcher. Structured interviews are typically based on a detailed interview schedule with questions asked in a specific order containing pre-defined responses for the participant. This is similar to the questionnaire-survey where the participant is required to make a single response to an item from a standardised bank of questions. Every effort is made to control the way these questions are asked in order not to bias the responses of the different interviewees. This control is manifest in the use of mostly closed questions based on numerical scales or tick boxes and the pre-testing of questions to ensure no ambiguity of meaning. Semi-structured interviews



typically try to balance such closed questions with open-ended ones. A schedule with ordered questions is still of use, but there exists more flexibility to allow for variation in the order in which groups of questions are asked.

The separation of theory and method which I discussed in section 4.3.1 is on display in these types of interviews. The latter are typically used within positivist research studies where it is considered possible to elicit participants' responses through interviewing without 'affecting' the nature of these responses. Several criticisms can be levelled against this 'classical' (Seale, 1998) approach to interviewing. Firstly it can be argued that what people say they do in interviews and what they do in wider social discourse are two different things. Although this criticism could also be made of 'qualitative' interviews, it typically refers to scheduled and standardised formats. In respect of the latter, researchers typically meet the interviewee only once, trust therefore not being well established, with the interviewee not able to talk about topics which do not appear on the interview schedule or to answer in ways which deviate from pre-coded options. One could argue that this creates an alienation in interviewees from the aims of the research thus increasing their propensity to give misleading replies. Secondly the variability of meaning is so great that attempts to standardise it in the form, for example, of fixed-choice attitudinal questions are at the very least problematic. As Cicourel (1964:108) remarks:

Standardized questions with fixed-choice answers provide a solution to the problem of meaning by simply avoiding it.

Methodologically, this research study aims to explore the construction of identities and differences through the participants' capacity to make meaning. Such structured and even semi-structured interview techniques do not have this qualitative potential. Developed particularly from the work of Cicourel, qualitative researchers have pursued the use of interviews in a different manner. Various called 'open-ended',

'unstructured' or 'depth' interviews, these qualitatively oriented interviews are aimed at gathering descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to their interpretation of the meaning of various phenomena (Kvale, 1983). The main reason for conducting qualitative interviews is to understand how individuals construct the meaning and significance of their situations from the complexity of this *Lebenswelt*. At the centre of this approach to interviewing lies a re-orientation of the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. In positivistically informed interviews, the interviewer is conceptualised as an impersonal machine-like investigator who tries to elicit answers from interviewees objectively by following definitive rules on leading and loaded questions, open-ended questions *inter alia*. From an interpretivist perspective, the relationship is better conceptualised as a form of social interaction (Silverman, 1993) between the interviewer and interviewee, where the researcher is recognised as part of the research process rather than a distraction from it and the interviewee too an active participant shaping the course of the interview rather than responding passively to the interviewer's questions. The researcher might still use a 'topic' guide as an aid which can be referred to when deciding where to take the interview as it proceeds. Alternatively, the researcher may dispense with any form of pre-determined guide regardless of how structured it is and engage in an 'open' or 'non-directive' interview (Easterby-Smith *et. al.*, 1991: 73) inviting the interviewee to talk about whatever they feel is relevant. According to Seale (1998: 206-207):

The interviewer's task then becomes one of monitoring what is emerging, perhaps gently guiding the speaker on to certain topics that seem promising, or asking for clarification when points made by the speaker seem unclear (...). The emphasis is on allowing the speaker to say how they see things, in their own words, rather than making them follow the researcher's agenda.

This approach to interviewing exhibits the particular advantage of flexibility (King, 1994) where the interaction is specifically designed to allow the researcher to follow certain discourses touched upon by the participant, to open up new perspectives on a



topic and thus to add new layers of interpretation to the meaning of phenomena. There is an extra dimension to this argument, however; a sociopolitical and ethical one concerning the power relations between the researcher and the participant over the control of meaning-making and identity creation. In structured interviews where it is necessary to try to avoid bias, the fact that the interviewer steadfastly refuses to reveal his or her own views and refuses to engage in a mutual process of meaning-making where he or she reveals his/her identity, just as the interviewee is required to do, can be seen as exploitative. An unequal and imbalanced relationship is set up where the researcher possesses all the power to define what is relevant and irrelevant, that is the power to control the meaning-making experience of the participant. The participants therefore have little opportunity to determine the agenda and more importantly have little power to represent themselves and their experiences *in their own terms*. The way in which that participant is represented is explicitly a matter for the researcher. Edward Said writes on this very issue in his book *Orientalism* (1978). Said's particular complaint refers to the French writer Flaubert's representation of the 'Oriental woman' based entirely on his encounters with an Egyptian prostitute. Said writes (1978: 6):

There is very little consent to be found, for example, in the fact that Flaubert's encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence or history. He (emphasis in the original) spoke for and represented her. He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male, and these were historical facts of domination that allowed him not only to possess Kuchuk Hanem physically but to speak for her and tell his readers in what way she was "typically Oriental".

Although Flaubert was presumably not carrying out structured interviews, or any form of interview for that matter, the point Said is making is a fundamental one for researchers concerning the politics of representation, or more precisely on their power over the representational possibilities of the Other. Said clearly condemns Flaubert for muting the courtesan's voice and thus her opportunities for representing herself. Although all researchers (both positivist and interpretivist) control the representational

possibilities of the Other in their studies through the simple act of authorship, the extent to which this occurs varies from study to study and author to author. The link between one's research methods and the theoretical perspective in which they are used exerts an important influence on this balance. Conceptualised as social interaction, the interview technique affords the interviewee a greater discursive space in which to express herself and her identities through mutual engagement with the researcher.

I believe that qualitative research interviews present several distinctive and useful perspectives for my research study. First it must be noted however, that interviews in themselves are not the most appropriate tool for collecting the specific forms of social texts which I require. I am specifically interested in the actual talk contained in meetings which interviews, either individual or group, do not capture. However they are useful for providing layers of contextual meaning which can help to build up a richer picture of the signifiatory processes in which the managers engage during their meeting. The most pertinent type of interview for this would be the 'open' interview in which no form of explicit and pre-determined topic guide is utilised. I feel I should qualify this however by pointing out that implicitly, there will still be a form of 'assumed' topic guide in so far as the topics of discussion will still be framed by my theoretical perspective. I do not believe it possible to 'just let the talk flow', somehow unhampered theoretically. The open interview will still involve a way of seeing, just not one codified into written form. Open individual interviews will enable my participants to interpret the meetings in which they took part in their own terms, to impute their own meaning onto any particular events and to explain to me the wider social, historical and contextual processes of which these meanings form part. As such qualitative interviews provided the capacity to build up a more detailed picture of the signifiatory processes of identity and difference and were therefore also used as a research method in the empirical investigation.



### 4.5.3 Documentary Evidence

Thus far I have presented detailed discussions on the appropriateness of observation methods and interview techniques for this research study, arguing that from a broadly interpretivist methodological perspective both are capable of capturing dimensions of the social texts in which I am interested. Primarily they encapsulate useful social and contextual dimensions. Documents such as files, statistical records, records of official proceedings, images (e.g. photographs), company brochures, internal memoranda and faxes *inter alia* might also provide additional contextual information and therefore I now discuss their qualitative potential. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1983: 142-143, in Silverman, 1993: 60-61):

The presence and significance of documentary products provide the ethnographer with a rich vein of analytic topics, as well as a valuable source of information. Such topics include: How are documents written? How are they read? Who reads them? For what purposes? On what occasions? With what outcomes? What is recorded? What is omitted? What is taken for granted? What does the writer seem to take for granted about the reader(s)? What do readers need to know in order to make sense of them?

Hammersley and Atkinson show that many interesting and potentially insightful questions can be asked about documents, questions which help us understand not only the text itself, but give wider clues to the context in which they were produced. In order to discuss briefly the potential richness of documentary evidence, I refer to one specific type of document which I collected during the research study: minutes of meetings (other documents I collected included faxes, company brochures and newsletters, photographs, financial data, time-graphs and production statistics).

Each of the warranty and service meetings which I attended took as their focus the minutes from the previous meetings. The minutes from one meeting thus became the agenda for the next. Each meeting had a separate set of minutes which documented individually the technical and service support issues for discussion and the warranty claims to be negotiated. The managers in my study showed a consistent concern with

the details contained in the minutes which they regarded as an ongoing record of the progress of an issue. In particular they were concerned with the accuracy of the details of certain issues and the way in which they had been written about in the minutes. The minutes were taken and written up alternately by the Scottish managers and the German managers. There were many examples during my research study of disputes over the minutiae of issues on the agenda. These disputes raise an interesting philosophical issue, one which has been central to the discussion of method thus far. The managers in the research study acted in the belief that the minutes provided an accurate representation of a reality (in this case issues of technical support or warranty claims). Viewed from the theoretical perspective of this study, it is possible to view these minutes not as reflections of reality but as creations of a reality based on discursively produced texts which represent a configuration of the managers' social and political positionings. Thus they are not neutral documents, but political ones written from a specific discursive perspective. Conceptualised in this way, it is possible to ask questions such as Hammersley and Atkinson's about the nature of the authorship of these documents and the configuration of relations on which they are based. These questions can help us interpret the nature of the relationships between the participants, the nature of the issue at hand and the discursive and political positioning of the participants in relation to the issue. Discussions on these issues can help us access the participants' constructions of the issues on which they are working. All documents are produced in particular circumstances for particular audiences and thus never speak for themselves, but are spoken for by others. Documents therefore provide me with interesting contextual perspectives on the construction of certain issues with the managerial relationships. Viewed as sociopolitically created texts, the collection of a variety of documents can provide additional layers of meaning for the discursive enterprise of this research.



#### 4.5.4 Transcription

I have attempted to clarify how the research methods reviewed thus far can be useful for this research study when conceptualised within the theoretical framework on which the methodology is based. Each of the methods reviewed shares the common feature of a focus on language, although they have a differential ability to elicit the language used by the managers in their interactions with each other. Although the non-verbal aspects of social interaction (such as proxemic and kinesic aspects of behaviour) are important in an attempt to give a holistic account of international managerial meetings, primary focus has been placed in this study on the conversations and thus the spoken aspects of the interactions. As research methods, observation, interview techniques and documents do not involve the direct recording of these conversations. Transcription, however, is of special value in this respect.

The main value in tape-recording and then transcribing talk lies in the fact that it furnishes a more detailed representation of what the participants actually did verbally *in situ* by enabling the researcher to produce detailed transcripts as material for interpretation. This must be qualified with the caveat that a transcript is a first step in interpretation, not a completely faithful reflection of verbal intercourse. This reflects Heritage's (1984) argument about the usefulness of 'naturally occurring talk' as contrasted with the talk recorded in interviews or noted during participant observation. Heritage (1984: 116) regards the latter as substitutes for the observation of actual behaviour and slightly poorer versions at that. Transcripts allow the researcher to record more detail than could be the case using observation or interviews thus helping avoid the limitations of intuition and recollections sometimes inherent in these techniques. Furthermore, the existence of the tapes allow both the researcher and the reader to return to various parts of conversations for purposes of re-interpretation and to check out the details of various analyses. This opens up interpretations to public

scrutiny and thus different perspectives and allows the material to be re-used and re-interpreted in the light of new findings or additional material. As well as words, transcripts can also help capture important aspects of the non-verbal behaviour of the managers, notably the raising of voices, intonation, prolongation of sounds and, very importantly, silences. These are all important markers in conversations which can help not only interpret the words or absences of words associated with them, but also in themselves help create certain conversational relationships. Going back to a point I made earlier, it must be noted that transcription is not simply a technical act prior to the main business of analysis. The act of transcription is a research act in itself involving close and repeated listenings to the recordings which often reveal previously unnoted interesting aspects of the talk. As such it was a research method which helped me strive for a thick and detailed interpretation and critique of my data by granting me access to the significatory processes contained in the discursive positioning of the managers' talk.

#### **4.5.5 Triangulation**

I set out at the beginning of this section to find appropriate research methods for this study. My particular concern was to identify research methods which would elicit the texts produced by the managers during their interactions as well as the wider contexts in which these texts were produced. In isolation each of these methods has a differential ability to accomplish these specific tasks. In isolation therefore the use of one method alone would ultimately create a theoretical imbalance in the material collected either creating an interpretation which would be too general or one which would be too specific and localised. This might force me into writing a text on so unacceptably general a level of description as not to be worth the effort, or in the second instance into writing so detailed and atomistic a series of analyses as to lose all track of the general lines of force impacting the managers' relations. The task in choosing an appropriate balance of research methods is therefore to recognise and interpret the specificity of



certain relations and to reconcile it with its intelligent and by no means passive or merely dictatorial general and hegemonic context (Said, 1978: 9).

In order to accomplish this, the research study made use of multiple methods, not just one, in what I would loosely label as a 'triangulated' research study. I have reservations about the use of term triangulation, but draw upon it in order to denote the fact that I utilised more than one source of data or method of data collection in the research study (Denzin, 1978). This triangulation of method allowed me to build up a more complex picture of processes of identification and differentiation within international management settings by building up layers for interpretation. The reason I have reservations about labelling my research study as triangulated is because of the frequent assumption amongst social researchers that the use of more than one source for data collection somehow allows for a 'truer' account of the social setting. Bloor (1978), for instance, argues against the equation of triangulation with the validation of data interpretation, pointing out that just because the latter is reproduced within data captured using multiple methods does not make that interpretation more true. I use the term triangulation with no claim that it leads to a more perceptive interpretation of my data, but more loosely to reflect the co-ordinated use of more than one method to capture some of the complexities of the substantive themes of this project. Having now outlined the reasons for choosing particular methods, in the next section I document what I actually did during my research study and reflect upon the approach that I adopted.

## 4.6 Research Process

According to Shaffir and Shebins (1991: 22):

Social science textbooks on methodology usually provide an idealized conception of how social research ought to be designed and executed. Only infrequently, however, do sociologists (and field researchers in particular) report how their research actually was done. As most field researchers actually would admit, the so-called rules and canons of fieldwork frequently are bent and twisted to accommodate the particular demands and requirements of the fieldwork situation and the personal characteristics of the researcher.

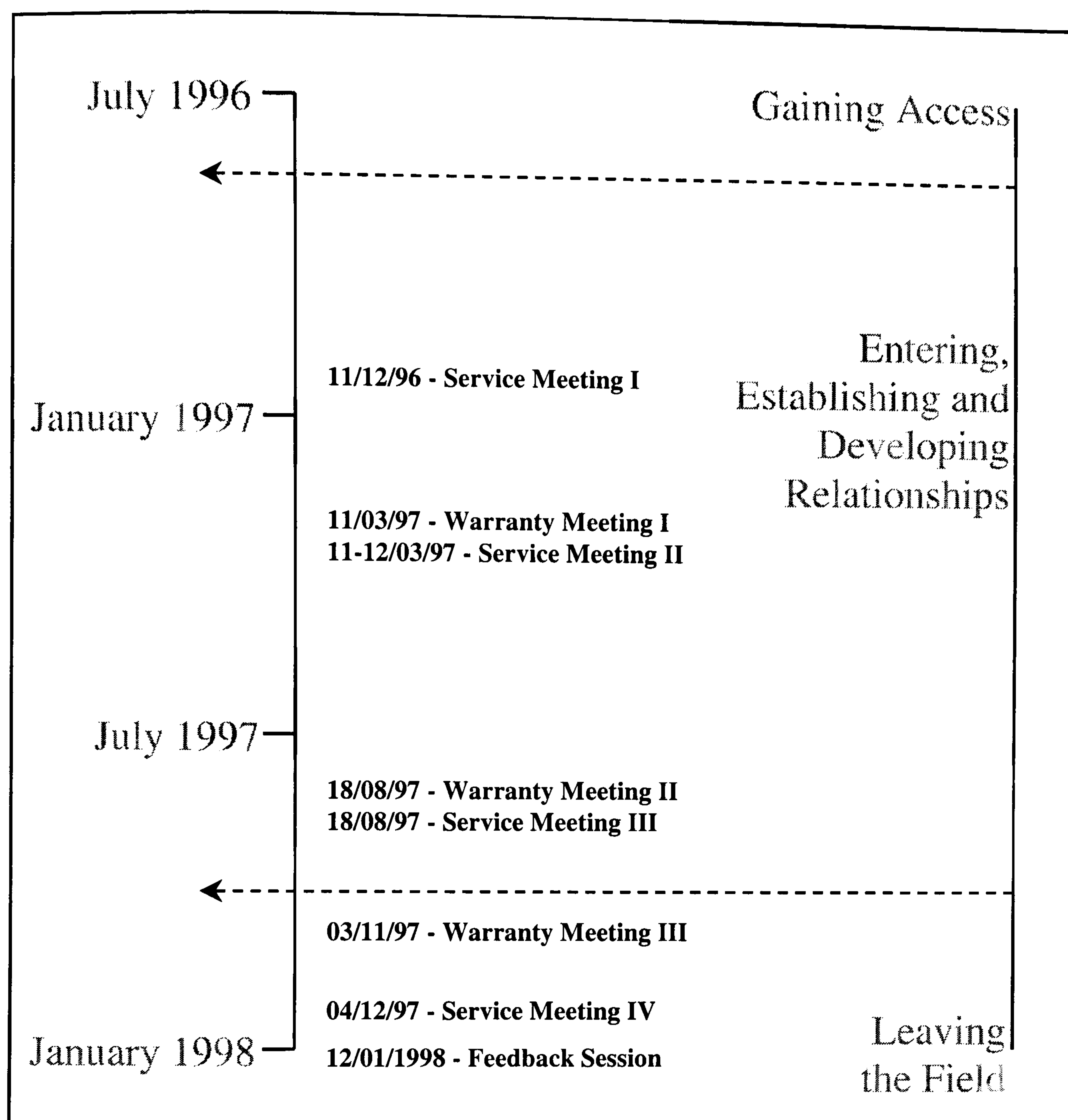
In this section I report how the research was actually done and in doing so, comment on both the requirements of the fieldwork situation and the way in which they affected my approach to the research as well as my personal interaction with the research participants. I hope to show how my fieldwork was always an emerging task (Van Maanen, 1983) and how the dilemmas of fieldwork were only ever answered once *in situ*.

### 4.6.1 Details of the study

I completed the research for this thesis over a total period of 18 months between July 1996, when the initial letter was sent to Bigtruck, and January 1998 when I organised a feedback session with the participants of the study. Figure 4.6.1 presents a timeline of the research study giving the reader an overview of the evolution of the research relationship. I have divided the timeline into three main parts which reflect this evolution: gaining access; entering, establishing and developing relationships, and finally leaving the field. This timeline should give the reader an overview of the key points in the flow of the research study. Given that I was not able to conduct an ethnography within the organisations, my 18 month study was characterised by my periodic rather than everyday presence within the research site. After a letter, two phone calls and an introductory meeting, access to the companies was granted by the gatekeeper in my study, Bigtruck's Director of Human Resources.



**Figure 4.6.1: Timeline**



The first contact I had with potential research participants took place some three months after the initial contact letter in the form of a meeting. The main purpose of this meeting was to begin to get a general feel for the research site, to find out who dealt with the German marketplace most frequently, to ascertain potential participants for my study and to begin to make my requirements as clear as possible. It was a first exercise in acculturation. At this meeting I ascertained that Bigtruck had contacts with two particular German companies, one of which was a distributor, the other a supply partner (Bergbau). All those present at the meeting introduced themselves and their work and declared their interest in my study. As well as those who attended, there were other

members of the company who dealt with the German marketplace who could not attend. As a consequence, my first decision after this meeting was to circulate a small questionnaire to those whom I had identified as potential participants to find out a little more about their contacts with German colleagues. Having done this I carried out some preliminary interviews over a period of six weeks to get a greater feel of the company itself and to establish further potential research relationships and thus gain a greater 'cultural competence'. At this time I had considered tape-recording telephone conversations à la Sacks (1974) between members of the parts department in Bigtruck and Bergbau. This proved unfeasible for technical reasons. I then considered following around the export manager on his journeys and taping his meetings. This again proved unfeasible for financial and logistical reasons. By December 1996 I had made the decision to focus on the relations between Bigtruck's service department and Bergbau's service and warranty departments, for reasons outlined in sections 4.4.3 and 4.4.4. This led to my presence at my first Service Meeting which allowed me to begin to shape up the best use and combination of my chosen research methods.

#### **4.6.2 Details of the method**

In terms of the precise combination of research method it was only after attending this first Service Meeting in Scotland that I knew what would be a feasible research strategy. Beginning with transcription, I was granted permission by both the Germans and the Scots to tape-record the conversations (see next sub-section for notes on tape recording and note taking) which I subsequently did. Unfortunately this was not possible for the warranty meetings. Recording and transcription therefore provided the main research method for this project. In addition to tape-recording and then transcription, I also used interviews both prior to and after the meetings. These were carried out to try to ascertain the participants' hopes and expectations for the meeting, their construction of the most important issues on the agenda, their feelings about it and



afterwards their reflections on how the meeting had gone, their comments on certain issues and their hopes for the next meeting. These were 'open' interviews where I encouraged the participants to talk freely on their feelings about the meeting. There were no pre-arranged questions. I tried to listen to their talk and elicit more depth of response by following up by question any reflection which seemed important to them. These interviews were carried out in order to add layers of interpretation onto the meeting itself.

During the meeting I collected any documents I could, notably the minutes of the meeting. During the meeting I also took observational notes, noting down the basic structure and flow of the meeting, any quotes which I felt were of particular relevance and importantly non-verbal aspects of the meeting such as the surroundings and any notable kinesic or proxemic behaviour from the managers. It had been my intention to carry out an in-depth observation study of the body language of the managers as I felt this would be a suitable complement to the tape-recordings of the talk. In practice this was not realistic. I did not find it physically possible to note down the intricate details of the individual manager's body language nor did I find it physically possible to observe non-verbal language as well as to listen to the talk itself. I needed to listen carefully to the talk in order to understand the issues being discussed to help me interpret at a later point the identities and differences being constructed through it. I had considered using a video camera and mentioned this at initial interviews with potential participants. They did not wish to be video recorded. As such I attempted to record any recurring aspects of the managers' non-verbal behaviour but concentrated on listening to the talk. In the time outside these meetings I was able to gather other documents such as faxes, photographs, newspaper articles, brochures, press releases and memos which helped to build up a richer picture of the companies. Periodically I also phoned the managers who participated in my study in order to find out what was

happening at that time between the companies. Essentially this was an exercise in maintaining good research relations.

In total I was present at 4 service meetings (2 in Scotland, 2 in Germany) and 3 warranty meetings (1 in Scotland, 2 in Germany) ranging in length from three to six hours long. I conducted a total of 27 interviews (only 20 of which were recorded) varying from 20 minute post-meeting 'talks' to 2-hour formal open interviews. The length of each of these meetings and interviews, whether they were recorded or not, the pseudonyms of the participants and their date and location, and their corresponding tape numbers are detailed for the reader's perusal in Appendix One. In total, I gathered 42 hours of recorded talk from the 4 service meetings and 20 interviews which were actually recorded. In terms of data management, I used 90 minute tapes which I labelled with dates, names and a coloured sticker and coding number for ease of organisation and subsequent reference. I took notes on the 3 warranty meetings and 7 remaining interviews which I could not record. In the next sub-section I comment on the reasons for the balance of tape-recording to note-taking and detail more generally the nature of the materials which I collected.

#### **4.6.3 Material collected**

There were two important situations where I had to decide whether I wished to tape-record my participants or simply take notes on what they said. The first situation referred to the managers' meetings. Methodologically it was imperative that I tape-record these meetings for the sake of the accuracy and detail needed to interpret the textual relations created therein. I gained permission from all the managers except one to record their talk. I respected the wishes of this solitary participant and as a consequence only have recordings of the service meetings and notes of the warranty meetings. However, I did not wish to exclude the textual relations of the warranty



meetings simply because they were not recorded. I was able to take detailed enough notes to be able to record and thus interpret some recurring and interesting discursive relations during these meetings too. I therefore have a combination of tapes and fieldnotes from both sets of meetings. The fieldnotes themselves were structured around the ideas of Schatzman and Strauss (1973) who suggested that notes should be divided into three sections: one for thick description; one for preliminary interpretation and one for reflections on methodology. For the most part I attempted to remain faithful to this structure, but in practice this sometimes proved difficult with the result that my notes tended to be more descriptive than reflective in as far as a distinction can be made between the latter.

The main criticism of tape-recording participants' talk is that the knowledge they are being recorded may affect their responses and make them feel uncomfortable. This effect is similar to the notion of reactivity discussed in section 4.5.1. Goffman's (1959) notion of performance is useful here. Accordingly, the interviewee is seen to be on stage when being tape-recorded, giving more socially acceptable versions of phenomena as a result. When not being recorded, that is being backstage, it can be argued that the responses are more genuine because the participant feels less exposed and more comfortable. I have no doubt that this happened during my research at least to some extent: one participant felt so uncomfortable that she was not willing to be recorded. However in terms of the meetings, I had more to lose by not recording the meetings even with this caveat in mind and therefore felt it was a sacrifice worth making. The fact that the participants were interacting in the first instance with each other and not with me or the recorder, that they had a limited amount of time to deal with issues in meetings and that they became used to the presence of a tape recorder meant that over time it seemed not to have any 'reactive' effect on the proceedings. The managers were entirely comfortable with it, so much so that they even helped find the

optimum position for improving the sound quality of the recordings at every subsequent meeting and even recommended more sophisticated machines and good quality German tapes. Whereas taping did not prove problematic in the case of the service meetings, the interviews proved slightly more difficult.

As indicated in section 4.6.2, I wished to carry out pre- and post-meeting interviews. First of all, this very often proved unfeasible given the tight timescale in which the meetings took place. Before the meetings there was practically no time in which I could talk confidentially to the managers and as a consequence I had to give up the idea of taping before the interviews. Similarly after the meetings time was restricted as on each occasion the travelling party was required to depart for the airport. Despite this I was still able to carry out some of these interviews. Any comments or reflections made before or after the meeting by any participant were therefore noted by me rather than tape-recorded. The more important second point here is that I was able to capture more 'colourful' and perhaps therefore more 'genuine' (sic)<sup>64</sup> reflections on the meetings and the contexts in which they were held when I was not tape-recording the interviews. One could argue that this was simply because these reflections were imparted at different times and in different contexts and that the 'conditions' were more propitious to 'open' narratives. For example the hotel bar, the airport lounge, the *Kantine* and the car back to the hotel provided rich grounds for the collection of added layers of interpretation. I could only make mental notes of these and write them up at the next possible point. One could argue that the differences I noticed in the recorded and unrecorded accounts of the same people on the same events were a function of the presence or absence of a tape-recorder.

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<sup>64</sup> I am aware of the difficulties of any claim to authenticity of data here, hence my use of the inverted commas. I use the term nevertheless to communicate the sense that what participants tell you 'off-the-record' is sometimes a more accurate reflection of their personal belief or opinion on a topic.



As I note in my logbook:

Switching off the recorder seemed to act as a floodgate for comments. The recorder seemed to be a barrier and taking it away allowed the participants to say more.

As a result of this I decided to change my interviewing strategy following Easterby-Smith *et. al.*'s (1991: 79) suggestion that:

The deciding factor should not be whether or not to tape, or whether permission will or will not be given, but rather what effect its use will have on the interview interaction in terms of the relationship and the data created.

I therefore made maximum use of both tapes and notes, taping where at all possible and always making mental and then written notes. All in all, my data comprised transcripts<sup>65</sup> from meetings and interviews, observational notes from meetings, notes from interviews and a variety of different documents. A final point I would like to make on taping is that I had certain technical difficulties which sometimes resulted in the loss of some talk. I once forgot to switch the microphone on during an interview, the batteries on the machine ran out during a meeting, there was at times noticeable background noise in the Dortmund conference room and the tapes sometimes stuck in the machine or slipped between conversations. These technical hitches were frustrating and caused the loss of some valuable data.

#### **4.6.4 My role in the research**

One of the key themes running through much of the discussion in the chapter thus far has been the role of the researcher in empirical studies. At several points during the text I have contrasted the way in which the role of the researcher in relation to the 'researched' has been conceptualised differently according to the theoretical approach adopted. In terms of the present study, I conceptualise the relationship between me and my participants as a form of social interaction where I recognise my role in shaping the

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<sup>65</sup> I did not use a detailed transcription system such as that suggested by Gail Jefferson. I considered this of limited use since I was not interested in the pixels of language to this extent. Rather I did a verbatim

research process as well as the role of my participants to construct actively rather than respond passively to the research study. As an active participant in the research process, it is ultimately my theoretical perspective and my authorship of the research study which construct discursively the identities and differences of the participants. As such I play an important sociopolitical and ethical role in the research relationships. Within a hermeneutic perspective like the one adopted in this study, reflection on one's own identity and difference as a researcher as part of a recursive Self/Other dichotomy is a vital part of the double hermeneutic. Rather than simply being concerned with representing the subject of the study itself, this perspective also makes it necessary to engage the hermeneutic circle and reflect upon those making that representation. In this sub-section, I firstly explore the construction of my identity and difference in the study and secondly consider the significant political and ethical implications of my study for my participants.

It is often assumed that the identity of the researcher will have an impact on the research being undertaken (Silverman, 1993). The age, gender, ethnicity or language ability of the researcher *inter alia* are considered to have an effect on the responses given by the participants to the researcher. From this perspective I could certainly assert that my identity as a 'young student' would have had an influence on the participants' perceptions and consequent responses to my requests, especially in the initial stages. I was frequently asked, for example, what I would do when I stopped being a student and 'got out into the real world'. The implication of this statement would seem to be that I was young and that my career had not really started yet: I was still playing around in the inconsequential, immaterial, 'unreal' world of the student, scrabbling around trying to do a research project. My response to their remarks that "well, this is the real world, real enough for me anyway" was not particularly appreciated. This initial perception of me

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transcription of all my text, only including important non-linguistic features where I 'heard' them to be



changed substantially through the course of the study. If anything it gave a low platform from which to start, since most of the Bigtruck employees 'took pity' on my situation and were willing to help. Moreover, with the exception of my gatekeeper, there were no great expectations about how much of the 'real world' I would be able to understand and thus how much I could feasibly contribute to the organisation. There is however a more important point at stake here, one which I articulated in section 4.5.1 with regard to observation techniques. As I developed a rapport with the managers with whom I interacted, the nature of the research relationship changed dramatically from these initial constructions of my identity. The change did not however take place from one end of a binary to another e.g. formal to informal, or from active to passive. At different points in time and space I was regularly forced to reconstruct my identity during the research relationship by means of a recursive positioning within and between various discourses at a very local level. I do not mean to suggest that I engaged in a form of cynical impression management in order to manoeuvre between the participants and thus position myself optimally within the research setting, although I am sure this was at times at least partly the case. Rather, the long duration of the research relationship meant that the possibilities I had to occupy different types of discursive space became increasingly numerous the longer I was *in situ*. I thus had the chance to position myself recursively as a friend, a colleague, a Scot, an intellectual and researcher, a white man, a sympathiser, an outsider, a supporter of the German perspective, a supporter of the Scottish perspective, an *agent provocateur*, a linguist, an ally of the human resource manager, a threat, an agony aunt and an interpreter *inter alia*. The point is that even within the course of meetings, sometimes from one minute to the next quite literally, the identities which I constructed through talk, sometimes consciously, sometimes not, changed. This begs the question of exactly whose identity was under scrutiny, as it seemed that my identity and difference as much as those of my

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significant in the flow of the talk, e.g. silences, coughs, mumbles, raised intonation, *inter alia*.

participants constantly changed position within and across various discursive contexts. My participants were therefore as much involved in constructing my identity as I was theirs and they were their own.

I now move on to the sociopolitical and ethical implications of my research. All social research involves some form of intervention into (Fryer and Feather, 1994) or engagement with (Punch, 1994) the *Lebenswelt* of the participants involved. This engagement brings with it certain obligations to the participants in terms of attempting to avoid questionable research practices. Selltiz *et. al.* (1969: 202) identified ten categories of questionable practice in social science research:

1. Involving people in research without their knowledge or consent.
2. Coercing people to participate.
3. Withholding from the participant the true nature of the research.
4. Deceiving the research participant.
5. Leading the research participants to commit acts which diminish their self-respect.
6. Violating the right to self-determination: research on behavior control and character change.
7. Exposing the research participant to physical or mental stress.
8. Invading the privacy of the research participant.
9. Withholding benefits from participants in control groups.
10. Failing to treat research participants fairly and to show them consideration and respect.

Not all of these points were relevant to my research: my participants had knowledge of the aims of the research and gave their consent to participate in it fully; I did not need to coerce them into participation; they were not consciously deceived; the benefits of the study were explained to them and delivered in the form of a report and group feedback; I respected the boundaries of privacy constructed by the participants when they felt threatened e.g. when Vera did not wish to be tape-recorded; they were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity; they were consulted at all stages of the research and helped shape the format of certain stages and I would certainly hope to have treated them with the respect and gratitude which they deserved. However Selltiz *et al's* 'code'



does point to certain areas of my research which had important political and ethical ramifications.

Firstly there were times when I could accuse myself of 'deceiving' my participants. During the course of the research I developed a very strong and personal relationship particularly with the Scottish managers. This relationship was strongly based on trust to the extent that they perceived me to be 'on their side' and to be able to confide their true feelings about the 'Germans' to me when we were 'backstage' (Goffman, 1959) in hotel bars, airport lounges, taxis, Biergartens *inter alia*. The truth was that it was precisely in these locations that I elicited some of my best data. In effect I was still in 'research mode' when we were backstage. I was not just a 'friendly observer' willing to participate in a certain construction of the 'Other'. At times I was in fact placed in a compromising position by the Scottish managers who tried to coerce me into reinforcing their constructions of the identity of the German managers. When describing one of the German managers as the new 'Goebbels propaganda machine' for example, I was forced into a dilemma of whether to challenge the Scottish manager's assertion or whether to let him continue in this construction. I simply avoided a choice by changing the subject. Perhaps this was a choice?

This issue of the politics of representation contains within it significant ethical dimensions which Selltiz *et. al.* refer to under the rubric of 'the right to self-determination'. When discussing the political and ethical implications of different approaches to interviewing (see sub-section 4.5.2), I considered the way in which research methods and researchers control to a greater or less extent the power which participants have to determine the research agenda and thus to determine the way in which they represent themselves. I attempted to give as much power as possible, relative to other research strategies, to the research participants to construct their own

identities as well as the identities of others. I did this by engaging in 'unstructured' discursive texts in which they had the power to express their experience. Although ultimate control will always lie with the researcher as a consequence of the framing of the research by a theoretical perspective and through the act of writing, I felt that ethically this might place the responsibility for meaning-making in the participants' own hands. However as the incident which I previously related should indicate, perhaps some form of intervention, some form of *praxis* on my behalf could have been engaged in order to force the manager to reflect on his discursive practice. The danger here lies in the possibility that intervention could be regarded as just as ethically dubious as no form of action at all.

A final point in Selltiz *et. al.*'s code which is of relevance to my study is that of the mental stress which a piece of research might cause to the participants. The authors state that the researcher should avoid practices which cause feelings of anxiety, anger, embarrassment or fear amongst participants. For the most part this was not an issue until the closing stages of my study when I issued copies of my 25-page final report entitled 'Strategic and cultural aspects of Anglo-German cooperation' to the participants in my research<sup>66</sup>. The report itself, which I had considered a 'fair' document, caused a certain amount of negative reaction among the participants. I removed all attributions from quotations and gave no indication of the source of any information. Despite this they felt slightly betrayed by me because I had implicated them (as a whole) in some of the more problematic aspects of the ongoing relationship documented in the report, thus causing some anger among them in the short term. More significantly, the report had been passed to the senior management because my gatekeeper felt it was an important document, a fact of which the participants were aware. Despite removing any attribution to information and quotations in the report, one of the Scottish managers felt

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<sup>66</sup> I have not included a copy of the report as an Appendix in this thesis because of its confidential nature.



that he could still be identified by the language used and opinions expressed in some of the sections of the report thus making him slightly apprehensive about potential 'reprisals' from his boss. Selltitz *et. al.* (1969: 247) warn of the potential danger of such research reports:

(...) problems of anonymity arise when a report is written. Even though pseudonyms for both the group and the individual in the group are used, experience indicates that the true identity of the group or community soon becomes known. When this happens, it is often possible (...) to identify key individuals in the report. (...) the effect can be embarrassing and in some cases, disruptive to the life of the community and damaging to the reputation and well-being of the individuals.

The reverberations of the report around the service support and sales departments of Bigtruck resulted in me being requested by the two managers with whom I had worked as well as my gatekeeper not to send the document to the Bergbau managers because of its potentially 'explosive' nature. I had been specifically requested to forward a copy by the German managers and as a result I faced the dilemma of what to do. I decided not to send the report to Dortmund in order not to cause any antagonism between the managers and their organisations. Although the fears of the Bigtruck managers may have been slightly exaggerated, they do point to the political and ethical nature of the interactions with which they are associated. It is here that I recognise similar concerns with the political and ethical nature of my research to those documented in Parker (2000b: 238) who talks in similar ways about his '(...) complicity in the internal politics' of the organisations which he studied. Such reflections at once undermine the claims of those, notably positivist researchers, who purport the objectivity of their research and the possibility of empirical studies which leave the field 'untouched' by the politics of research relationships.

## **4.7. Interpreting the Data**

The chapter so far has presented and justified the 18-month multi-method study of difference carried out for this thesis. It has argued for the broadly interpretivist methodology which framed the study, outlined and accounted for the choice of research site and participants, and explained the use of multiple methods (principally participant observation, unstructured interviewing, transcription and document collection) for eliciting suitable data. This section brings chapter four to a close by detailing the ways in which I interpreted the data collected during the research study. It begins by considering the multitude of approaches to analysing textual data, outlines the pluralistic strategy ultimately adopted to interpret the data and considers issues of the validity of evidence and interpretation.

### **4.7.1 Approaches to data interpretation**

As with data collection, all forms of interpretation and analysis place boundaries around the data through the process of reduction inherent in any interpretative scheme. These boundaries reduce the data into meaningful sets of relations, sometimes called concepts, which form the building blocks of some form of theoretical understanding. In this way, interpretative schemes act as divisions in the same sense outlined at length in chapter three: they serve to ‘organise’ certain understandings by including specific aspects of the data, whilst simultaneously ‘disorganising’ other understandings by excluding other aspects. The extent to which interpretative schemes organise and disorganise, and therefore act in interpretatively exclusive ways, very much depends on the degree to which the particular approach to analysis structures and formalises the reduction of data (Lindlof, 1995). Given that I am interested in understanding the complex social processes of identification and differentiation which occur through the texts and contexts of managerial language, an approach to data interpretation which is suitable for this project should avoid overly formalised and overly structured methods of



interpretation. This is particularly so at the outset of the interpretative analysis where overly structured schemes might act in hastily exclusive ways and thus reduce even further the particularities of the data. In this sub-section I consider a number of different approaches (content analysis, sociolinguistics, conversation analysis, thick description, coding and categorisation) to data interpretation in terms of their sensibilities for capturing the social, processual, relational, contextual and political nature of differentiation and identification. The approaches highlighted below were chosen because they are all typically applied to the study of *texts* in disciplines such as literary criticism and interpretative sociology, thus making them compatible, at least on first sight, with the broader conceptual framework of this study.

As alluded to above, the first concern in conceiving a suitable approach to interpreting my data is that it should not be overly formalised and structured, particularly at the initial stages of the analysis. This is a difficulty for analytical approaches which might be approached in broadly *deductive* ways<sup>67</sup>, that is those which start with particular categories of analysis in mind. Approaches such as *content analysis* and *sociolinguistics*, with their implicit positivistic overtones, would fall into this problematic category. Beginning with content analysis, Manning and Cullum-Swan (1994: 464) define this as:

(...) a quantitatively oriented technique by which standardized measurements are applied to metrically defined units and these are used to characterize and compare documents.

Put simply, this involves establishing categories for analysis<sup>68</sup> (words or phrases) and then counting the number of instances when those categories are used in a particular

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<sup>67</sup> I consider the 'inductive-deductive' binary which is frequently used to characterise approaches to data analysis as spurious. The distinctions are too clear cut. I would consider my analytical approach as broadly inductive in so far as it develops themes from the managers' texts. However since I approached these texts with a specific framework and questions in mind, my analysis also contained a deductive element as I implicitly included and excluded certain insights on the basis of these theoretical concerns.

<sup>68</sup> Occasionally these analytical units are derived from an initial investigation of the text thus bringing some kind of inductive aspect to the approach. Most often however, content analysis proceeds through the use of pre-defined units of analysis.

item of text (Silverman, 1993). The greater the frequency of the category the more significant it is considered. The main problem with this approach is that it is unable to capture the context within which a text has meaning and as such is unable to provide a holistic approach to textual relations. It ignores what the reader brings to the text, the tacit knowledges which frame these words and the ongoing narratives through which words or phrases come to acquire significance. A single word can therefore mean different things in different contexts: content analysis does not engage with this plasticity of meaning. Extra-textual realities are ignored and the construction of reality through text is similarly de-emphasised (Silverman, 1993). As a consequence, the interpretative role of any analytic strategy is marginalised by content analysis through its imposition of categories for counting. Its highly formalised, structured and most often positivistic approach render it an unsuitable method for my study.

The difficulties of broadly positivistic, deductive approaches to data interpretation can also be seen in relation to sociolinguistics. Sociolinguistics arose within linguistics and sociology to highlight the variations found in different social contexts of speaking (Labov, 1972) and among various cultural and ethnic groups (Gumperz, 1982). The work of Gumperz is of particular relevance here since he was concerned with the role of context in the production and interpretation of talk. By analysing the grammatical and prosodic features of interracial and interethnic groups, Gumperz demonstrated that interactants from different sociocultural backgrounds may 'hear' and understand talk differently according to their interpretation of various contextualisation cues, such as intonation or directness. Arguing that we interact with orientations only to those contextualisation cues which our culture prepares us for, Gumperz asserted that miscommunication can occur when we come into contact with interactants who do not share our cultural context.



On the surface this approach would seem pertinent to my research study given the involvement of two nationalities. Sociolinguistics has been useful in explicating the socially negotiated nature of language practice, a basic assumption of critical language studies. However, sociolinguistics has been significantly influenced by positivistic conceptions of social science. In the work of Gumperz, for example, 'culture' is taken to be a pre-existing social fact that deterministically influences our use of language and understanding of various discursive cues. It is considered to be external to the individual in order that responses to different contextualisation cues can be attributed to a 'wider' phenomenon. Sociolinguistic variation in a particular society is thereby seen in terms of sets of facts to be observed and described using methods analogous to those of the natural sciences (Fairclough, 1989)<sup>69</sup>. Moreover, sociolinguistics is poor at explaining the 'how' question of social interaction and as such ignores questions of power relationships. Given its assumption of culture as a social fact and its incapacity to deal with the process of social interaction and its political nature, sociolinguistics did not seem a suitable approach for interpreting the data. A more inductive approach, or at least one which does not begin by assuming categories of analysis, is more beneficial to my study. The analytic approach adopted needs to deal with lay categories for signifying identities and difference; it also needs to avoid the temptation to formalise and structure the analysis too quickly at the outset.

A further criterion for deciding upon a suitable method for data interpretation is its ability to be sensitive to the contextual dimensions of identification and differentiation. In this respect I look at two further approaches, namely those of *conversation analysis* and Geertzian '*thick description*'. Beginning with conversation analysis, this is a sociological approach developed largely in the USA by Harvey Sacks (1992a, 1992b),

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<sup>69</sup> I mention Fairclough's (1989) *Language and Power* here which forms part of his wider work on critical discourse analysis. Again this was a potential methodological approach which I considered, but

Emanuel Schegloff and David Sudnow during the 1960s and the 1970s. Their approach to the study of conversation was significantly influenced by the work of ethnomethodologist Harold Garfinkel who had championed the study of the mundane activities of everyday life as a legitimate focus for sociological inquiry and whose students they had been. The original focus of conversation analysts was not so much on talk, but the meaningful conduct of people in society, that is, how people in society produce their activities and make sense of the world around them. Thus the conversation analytic approach is not limited to an explanation of talk alone but is amenable to an analysis of how praxis works in whatever form it is accomplished. Such a concern with praxis was combined with the development of a rigorous empirical methodology whose objective it was to identify subjects' social understandings and practices. This led to an insistence of the use of materials collected from 'naturally' occurring talk in everyday interaction in the form of detailed transcriptions, focusing on the study of conversation and its organised and sequential forms.

One of the deficiencies of conversation analysis has been its inadequate conceptualisation of the connection between the details of conversations and the wider contexts in which they are produced. This is not helpful in detecting and accounting for power relations in terms of discourse. In Sacks's (1972) examination of telephone conversations to the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Center, for example, the parties to the conversations are treated as equals and the contextual effects of wider social discourses are not recognised. This gives the impression that talk is a skilled social practice existing in a social vacuum as if talk were generally engaged in for its own sake. Such an image is merely reinforced by the focus on conversation as an accomplishment of the social actors who produce it and the corresponding emphasis on the actor's perspective which somehow simply 'experiences' the conventions of everyday life as common-sensically there, rather than a configuration of positions in

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discounted on account of its implicit functionalism and positivism in which the micro-details of interaction are determined by factitious macro structures.



discourses. A second main problem with conversation analysis, according to Eggins and Slade (1997: 32), is its fragmentary focus on small excerpts of talk which renders it unable to deal comprehensively with complete, sustained interactions. It therefore lacks a sense of the holistic and sustained nature of interactions, particularly if they have a historical background. Conversation analysis takes too narrow an approach which omits to relate language to its wider context, thus placing managerial talk in effect in a social vacuum. However, in terms of the contextual sensibility, the reverse of this situation would seem to apply to Geertzian 'thick description', noted for its focus on cultural context.

In opposition to the 1950s/1960s ethnoscientific tradition in anthropology which emphasised the possibility of 'descriptive neutrality' (Hammersley, 1992), Geertz (1973) proposed that the task of the ethnographer was to produce his/her own distinctive form of knowledge, thick description, where the focus of analysis turned to seeing culture as a system of signs rather than a science. The ethnographer was tasked to find a whole web of cultural structures, knowledge and meanings which are knotted and superimposed onto one another and which constitute a densely layered cultural script. In *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Geertz famously analyses the many layers of meaning which are involved in Balinese cockfights as an example of a cultural script or text being written or enacted. Through an intensive and dense description of a cockfight, Geertz makes broader cultural interpretations and generalisations about Balinese culture. Interestingly however, Geertz understands his own analysis of the various meanings of the event as a reflexive interpretation of it rather than an objective description. As Geertz (1973: 18) argues:

Cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape.

And the better guesses come from remaining close to the social action, attempting to capture in as much depth as possible the contexts in which this action takes place. Interpretations hover so low over the contexts which govern them that they make very little sense apart from them. Geertz's approach offers a distinctive perspective for this

research study. With its focus on rich description, it is a particularly useful approach for capturing and interpreting the contexts in which the talk between the managers took place. This rich description helps situate the talk historically and sociopolitically and thus furnishes extra layers of meaning onto the talk. On its own however, thick description does not offer a particular perspective on the finer details of the managers' talk and textual relations *per se*. Although it takes account then of the context in which the text takes place, it does not provide the detailed representation and exact linguistic practices of the managers' talk, thus rendering it unable to attend to the fine-grained nature of the managers' language.

A final criterion for evaluating interpretative strategies for my data is a hermeneutic one, that is one which concerns the relationship between the 'text' as a series of connected and disconnected parts, and the text as a 'whole'. My concern here is that the data interpretation has both a 'local' focus, in so far as it should deal with particular instances of managerial language, as well as a more 'global' one, which indicates the relationship between these particular instances as part of the whole text. This hermeneutic strategy should indicate whether particular kinds of identification and differentiation are prevalent throughout all of the texts, i.e. whether there are recurrent patterns or themes in the data, whilst simultaneously being able to give local instantiations of these themes. This hermeneutic concern might even proffer comment on the contextual patterning of the relationship between the texts as a whole and the texts as separate parts. Whilst I have given several examples of interpretative methods which focus on textual parts, I have yet to account for one which allows coverage of the texts as a conceptual whole. The most prominent method for gaining such an overview is to use some form of *textual coding or categorisation*.

Coding and categorising is an analytical approach to data which subsumes a very broad set of procedures from grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and its various appropriated forms such as Strauss and Corbin's (1990) coding paradigms and Silverman's (1985) analytic induction to computer-based techniques (such as the use of software packages like NUDIST, THE ETHNOGRAPH, QualPro, Word Match TAP



and Word Cruncher) and interactive flow models (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Although diverse, coding and categorising techniques are intended to assist the researcher detect patterns in the data. In simple terms, the categories which emerge from the data can be related to one another in order to construct a theoretical explanation of the phenomena under investigation.

According to Lindlof (1995: 224-225), coding:

(...) is a process in which the researcher creatively scans and samples data-texts, looks for commonalities and differences and begins to formulate categories of interest. Some codes may refer to first-order concepts: the descriptive practices of cultural membership. Other codes may be second-order concepts of the researcher's own invention or constructs existing in the literature. But their relevance must be founded on meanings within the situated action (first-order concepts). If not, they are being imposed illegitimately. The coder's first obligation is to respect the form and the sense of the original action.

Codes therefore serve as shorthand devices to label, separate and organise data and can range from concrete and topical categories to more general and abstract ones. Importantly for the coding approach, the codes must be *grounded* in the data themselves i.e. abstract inferences must always be linked to concrete instances (Lofland, 1976). Glaser and Strauss's constant comparative method, for example, specifies the means by which theory grounded in the relationships among data emerges through the management of coding and explicitly shows how to code and conceptualise as field data keep flowing in. The first step in this is to compare incidents applicable to each category and then assign 'incidents' from the text to categories. When considering a new incident the analyst continually compares it with those which have already been grouped together in the same category in order to establish its goodness of fit. Secondly, categories can be integrated and their properties compared and contrasted. Comparisons between incidents become less intuitive as explicit decision rules are developed inductively to account for the categories' defining properties. This is a dialectical process where the analyst integrates incidents with like features into properties and then uses the properties to verify whether or not incidents should stay in

particular categories. The task of integration changes the nature of categories from mere collections of coded incidents into constructs thus moving the analyst closer to a particular construction of the text. Finally, according to Glaser and Strauss, this extensive process of constant comparison and verification allow the researcher to delimit a form of substantive theory. A category becomes theoretically saturated when new incidents add little value to its conceptual content.

The interesting feature of this technique is that it is explicitly based on similarities and differences between incidents contained within data sets, thus at a superficial level rendering it an appropriate technique for this thesis. However coding and categorising can be seen to have some important drawbacks. Most importantly, by prescribing formal techniques for classification and categorisation, it could be argued that attention is drawn away from investigating the complexity of the data themselves towards the operations involved in the methodological procedure. The generation of explicit definitions of the properties of categories might restrict the scope of interpretation to formal and explicit understandings, rather than intuitive knowledge which emerges during fieldwork. This depends however on the type of coding and categorising used. The formal structuring method of Glaser and Strauss or even Corbin and Strauss might well be open to this criticism. The second point of criticism relates to the nature of the technique itself. One could argue that the labelling and definition of codes and categories and the emergence of theory from this rigid technique is in fact a form of positivism where the researcher attempts to forge immutable relationships between defined entities. A cursory reading of Strauss and Corbin's coding paradigms illustrates the way in which their procedures and techniques are couched in a positivist discourse according to which actors exhibit 'intentionality' based on relationships of certain 'motivations' to 'outcomes'. Whilst coding and categorising is useful then for the hermeneutic task of detecting patterns in the data as a whole, some caution must be



exercised in terms of the particular form which this coding might take. Having now discussed several approaches to textual interpretation in terms of their inductive, structuring, contextual and hermeneutic sensibilities, I now go on to outline and justify the exact strategy used to interpret my data.

#### **4.7.2 Strategy for data interpretation**

I immediately begin with a caveat. The way in which my approach to interpreting the data is presented in this section has involved a great deal of tidying up and ‘sanitisation’ of the actual process. Although not completely without some sense of structure at the outset, the process of data analysis was messy, full of stops and starts, uncertain and unnerving. As a profoundly iterative process, it was only after I had spent some time working through cursory attempts at analysing the data that a productive set of interpretative methods eventually emerged. Like the fieldwork then, the data interpretation was an emergent phenomenon. As such, this sub-section should be read not as a clinical, *a priori* set of interpretative decisions taken before approaching the texts, but an interpretative strategy which was worked out in the process of reading the texts. It became clearer and easier to do, the more I read and interpreted. Its presentation as a clear and ostensibly ‘linear’ set of stages is, to some extent at least, a post-rationalised and sanitised product of recursion. Bearing this in mind, I will begin this sub-section by describing what I actually did and then move on to a few key points which require some illumination.

In short, my strategy for interpreting the data could be described as *pluralistic* in the sense that it made use of more than one approach to textual interpretation. Specifically I drew upon the use of coding and categorisation, a semiotic square (which was not covered above), a little thick description to substantiate the categories and a Saidian inspired discourse analysis. For sake of clarity (and wary of its sanitising effects), the

process of interpreting the data took place in five iterative and recursive stages. I did not proceed necessarily in a linear fashion from one step to the next, but constantly moved backwards and forwards between the steps.

The **first** stage of the data interpretation took an inductive approach to the texts in so far as it aimed to identify and understand from the outset the various divisions and boundaries actively produced by the managers in their constructions of identity and difference. Having transcribed all the tapes as detailed in sub-section 4.5.4, I read through the transcripts once whilst simultaneously listening to the tapes, and once again without listening to the tapes. I approached these two initial readings of the data with one key question in mind: what divisions seems to be present/absent in the unfolding of these texts? Any divisions which I deemed relevant I marked with a highlighter pen, jotted down some scribbles, gave a title and then stuck a post-it note beside at the edge of the page for future identification. Approaching the texts in this way instantiated an informal and fairly unstructured kind of coding and categorisation. This follows Lindlof's (1995) suggestion highlighted earlier of beginning data analysis by identifying 'first order' concepts from the participants' talk and aspects of context.

The **second** stage moved from continuous and recursive readings of the text to interpretative activities involving the post-it notes and the various scribbblings which these readings provoked. What I did was to remove the post-it notes from the texts, using them to build up a series of analytic notes or 'memoranda' (Miles and Huberman, 1994) based around the divisions to which they referred. I kept these analytic notes in a separate folder in chronological order, recording the page number of the transcript from which they had come. These notes provided me with a method of fleshing out the first-order concepts and developing the interpretations contained within my initial jottings.



By stage **three**, I had already broken down the texts into some interesting divisions and certain themes or patterns had begun to emerge. In a sense, these themes had begun to structure themselves and I felt the need to bring a more formal structure to them that would allow more of an overview of the data as a whole than the numerous analytic memos provided. I felt the need to gain an overview of all the key themes on one single page, rather than several hundred. I achieved this overview through the use of mind-maps which I constructed from the analytic memoranda. These mind-maps involved several ‘bubbles’ which each represented a key theme and had attached to them a number of examples from the data which exemplified or instantiated the theme with a corresponding page reference. All in all, these mind-maps presented me with a large number of first-order concepts and divisions derived from the data itself, i.e. derived inductively, which I then converted into second order concepts in the following stage four.

As mentioned above, stage **four** involved the construction of second-order concepts from the first-order concepts identified above which corresponded more directly to my research aim and objectives. To this end, I made use of a semiotic square (Greimas and Rastier, 1968; Clifford, 1988) in order to mould the key themes around the key division or ‘opposition’ which emanated from the data, namely that between culture and business. As the next chapter illustrates, the managers drew a sharp, repeated and consistent distinction between ‘differences’ which they considered ‘cultural’ and those which were not, but were simply issues to do with the ‘business’. Through the operation of negation, I used this central opposition to construct four second-order concepts or categories which formed the analytic framework for the subsequent interpretation and presentation of the data in the next chapter. As such the next chapter comments in greater detail on the nature and use of the semiotic square. I would like to point out here however that I did not follow the clearly structuralist logic which is

normally attached to the use of the semiotic square for reasons already dealt with in this thesis (see chapter three, sub-section 3.4.3). I used it as a hermeneutic tool to organise my analysis around an empirically-derived division, in consonance with the exigencies of the conceptual framework set out in chapter three.

By stage **five** of the data analysis I had a set of second order categories which I could substantiate with recourse to the inductively derived materials of previous stages. These categories formed the basis for the interpretations presented in the next chapter. In order to bring a more critical dimension to and thereby a political commentary on these divisions and the categories which they established, I re-interpreted them through the lens of a Saidian inspired discourse analysis. This form of discourse analysis allowed me to suggest the power relations at work in processes of identification and differentiation and to explore the ways in which divisions serve to simultaneously privilege some and marginalise other managerial identities.

Having now described the process by which I interpreted the data, there are a few points of clarification required. Firstly this process moved consistently between the text as a whole and the texts as a set of parts in a recursive movement. The post-it notes and the analytic memo provided an interpretation of the individual parts; the mind-maps as well as the other tools of overview which I used e.g. inventories of ‘differences’, allowed me to grapple with the whole and thus detect patterns. As a recursive process where I went back and forward between the analytic notes and the mind maps, my interpretative strategy was essentially a structuring relationship of the textual data. As such my interpretation of a particular textual part was structured by my broader conception of the whole which had previously been structured by my previous readings of the parts etc. Interpretation was therefore recursive and re-historicising in nature. A second point of clarification is that this mutually structuring relationship between the parts and the



whole involved a continuous process of breaking down the texts and then building them back up in conceptually informed ways. As such, I started with transcribed data which I broke down into analytic notes and then began building it up again into mind maps and then into the second-order concepts of the semiotic square. Interpretation was thus an act of textual deconstruction and reconstruction; it involved seeing and thus organising certain things, whilst ignoring and disorganising other. On account of this conceptual vision and division of my data, the interpretative strategy followed in this thesis can at best claim to be nothing more than ‘(...) partial rewritings of partial understandings of partial data’ (Parker, 2000b: 240). This point leads us to the closing sub-section of this chapter which offers some comment on the validity of these ‘partial rewritings’.

#### **4.7.3 On the validity of interpretation**

In discussing the validity of my interpretations, I am clearly not pursuing this issue from the point of view of the positivistic search for objectivity in any truth-claim. As mentioned above, the interpretations of the data which will be presented in the next chapter are partial understandings of the managerial interactions which I surveyed, in consonance with my broader theoretical framework. They acted partially to include certain perspectives<sup>70</sup>, whilst simultaneously excluding others based on my personal interests. As such they can in no way claim descriptive neutrality; they were written from a very particular perspective and inevitably acted in totalising ways which smoothed out contradictions and incoherences in the texts, at least to some extent. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that my authorship of these interpretations does not make them any more valid than those which the managers themselves might make. Whilst researchers and research participants might commonly acknowledge the

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<sup>70</sup> This of course also relates to the particular sections of the transcript chosen for presentation. The quotations and episodes displayed in this chapter were chosen for rhetorical effect, that is because they seem to substantiate best the points I wished to make. As such I cannot claim to stand outside language. Rather I use chosen language for persuasive effect.

possibility of multiple interpretations, it is largely (but not always) a matter of discourse which frames any claim to greater validity. As Parker (2000b: 219) suggests:

There is not method or methodological position which would allow me to support any stronger claims. My respondent may well not recognise themselves and their organization in my case studies and many of them would almost certainly disagree with many of the matters I discuss.

Bearing the potential for an unbridgeable schism between my interpretations and those of my managers in mind, I carried out different forms of respondent validation as part of the research study. According to Bloor (1978), respondent validation involves the researcher giving the participants some kind of research report and recording their reactions to it. As mentioned earlier, in my research study this took the form of a 25-page document which was circulated to appropriate participants a week before I conducted an overall feedback session with them. As documented earlier and indeed will also later in this thesis, this brought out similar as well as contradictory interpretations of the same events/people/objects. We all shared however the belief that a variety of interpretations was possible and therefore potentially valid, even if we did not share the same interpretative version. It should be noted that the above is a formal kind of respondent validation. I also engaged in respondent validation more informally, however, by feeding emergent interpretations in the research process as it went along. Mostly this occurred through my conscious questioning of a participant about, say, a particular interpretation of a set of events he may have expressed on the previous day. However, I have no doubt that my engagement in the organisational setting meant that unconsciously too, I was consistently questioning my interpretations in tandem with my participants.

A related issue here is that of epistemological relativism and the solipsistic potential of interpretations. This is related to, but necessarily the same as the issue of validity, and can be expressed in the following question: is it possible to make *any* interpretation of



any phenomenon? My short response to this is no, since it is to conflate concepts of ontology and epistemology (Johnson, 1996). In common with Foucault (1977), Said (1978), Munro (1997) and Parker (2000b) I believe that whilst it is possible to accept a multitude of potential versions of reality as they are constructed through language and discourse, reality still has a 'material' dimension which is itself not malleable in the same way. As such, as Johnson (1996) strongly and convincingly argues, 'reality' has the potential to intervene in very direct and deterministic ways in one's life, that is in ways which have the same effect regardless of how they are represented. So, in the case of my research study, when a truck broke down in a field in Bulgaria for instance, there was no escaping the fact that this had material consequences (lost revenue, customer anger and frustration, and a stationary truck) which could not be changed by representing and interpreting them in different ways. As such, any interpretative scheme must consider the way in which material contexts have the capacity to restrict the number of interpretations that might be made of any particular situation. As such one might talk of constructing 'preferred' rather than 'absolute' or 'solipsistic' interpretations.

In sum then, this chapter has presented and justified the development and execution of the 18-month multi-method research study that was carried out in order to capture some of the empirical dimensions of difference. I have covered issues of methodological perspective, site selection and sampling, choice of research methods, the nature of the research process and the strategy for interpreting the data. The next chapter presents the results of the data interpretation which ensued from the empirical investigation documented in this chapter.

### AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF DIFFERENCE

#### 5.1 Summary

*The main objective of the research study documented in the previous chapter was to explore processes of differentiation and identification within an intercultural managerial setting. This chapter presents and substantiates the main findings of the study. Following an introduction in section 5.2, section 5.3 outlines the key division deployed by the managers in constructing difference, namely the division between differences which they deemed 'cultural' and those which were purely a matter of 'business'. Using this division as the basis for a semiotic square (Greimas and Rastier, 1968; Clifford, 1988), I go on to look in turn at each side of the culture-business opposition. Beginning with managers' notions of cultural difference in section 5.4, I outline the forms in which these differences materialised and the contexts in which they circulated. In particular I note the fluid boundaries that characterised the managers' constructions of cultural difference as well as the contested and contradictory elements which they suppressed. Section 5.5 switches focus and shows how the notion of business differences was constructed around the metaphor of the problem-solving, rational manager and its substantiation in a number of codified values, knowledges and communicative practices which the managers believed transcend all cultural boundaries. Section 5.6 scrutinises the managers' claims that business differences were neutral, obvious and a-cultural, and argues that this notion is the result of a process of objectification which separates the managers' claims about business difference from the human relations in which they took form. Consequently, section 5.7 recreates these meetings as spaces for the articulation and negotiation of a plurality of discourses which provide the resource for a 'fundamental' politics of identity and difference based on multiplicitous labourings of professional, functional, age and generational, sexual, aesthetic and gender divisions.*

#### 5.2 Introduction

The previous three chapters have set out the theoretical and methodological concerns of this thesis. Whilst chapter two provided a critique of functionalist, normal scientific and managerialist conceptions of difference which predominate the various literatures of international management, chapter three outlined an interdisciplinary theoretical framework for the study of difference primarily based on the concept of the 'labour of division' (Munro, 1997; Parker, 1997). Chapter four went on to document the translation of this theoretical framework into an appropriate research study, the main objective of which was to explore processes of differentiation and identification as they



took form within an intercultural managerial setting. To re-iterate I am interested in examining the ways in which managers organise their differences and identities, by attempting to render visible the labourings of division deployed by them as they divide and undivide within an ever-emergent sense of Self and Other (Watson, 1997). The objective of this chapter is to present and interpret the results of this empirical study of difference. These results have been reconstructed from transcript material of the meetings and interviews recorded by the author, observation notes and other documents collected during the fieldwork period July 1996 to January 1998. Before delving into the various interpretations of my data however, I should clarify certain points about the way in which this chapter is structured.

In terms of structuring my analysis, I have used the first-order concepts derived from recursive readings of the data to construct a semiotic square (Greimas and Rastier, 1968; Clifford, 1988) as presented in Figure 5.2. I should clarify that whilst semiotic squares are a formal logical device underpinned by expressly structuralist assumptions<sup>71</sup>, I have not used them in this chapter in this way. I use the semiotic square hermeneutically to act as an organising template for the chapter. This enables me to create a set of four broad second-order concepts which help relate more clearly the first-order concepts to the specific aims and objectives which this thesis sets out to address. Like semiotic analysts then I begin with binary oppositions, but instead of ascribing them with 'fixed' qualities, I mobilise the logic of my conceptual framework to undermine this fixity. In addition to this interpretivist work, I also draw upon discourse analysis (Said, 1978) to politicise the semiotic square. In doing this, I re-conceptualise the interviews and business meetings which I researched as spaces for the articulation and negotiation of a plurality of discourses which provide a resource for a 'fundamental' politics of identity

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<sup>71</sup> Through the operation of negations and the appropriate syntheses, any initial structuralist binary

and difference rather than just a channel of communication for managers. In reconstructing and re-politicising this space, the chapter attempts to demonstrate how the managers' multiplicitous labourings of professional, functional, age and generational, sexual, aesthetic and gender divisions served to privilege some, whilst simultaneously marginalising other organisational identities and differences.

As mentioned above then, this chapter is structured around the four second-order categories derived from the workings of the semiotic square. Before substantiating each of these categories, this chapter begins by looking at the opposition which forms the basis for the semiotic square.

### **5.3 Dividing Culturally: Delineating the Cultural and the Non-Cultural**

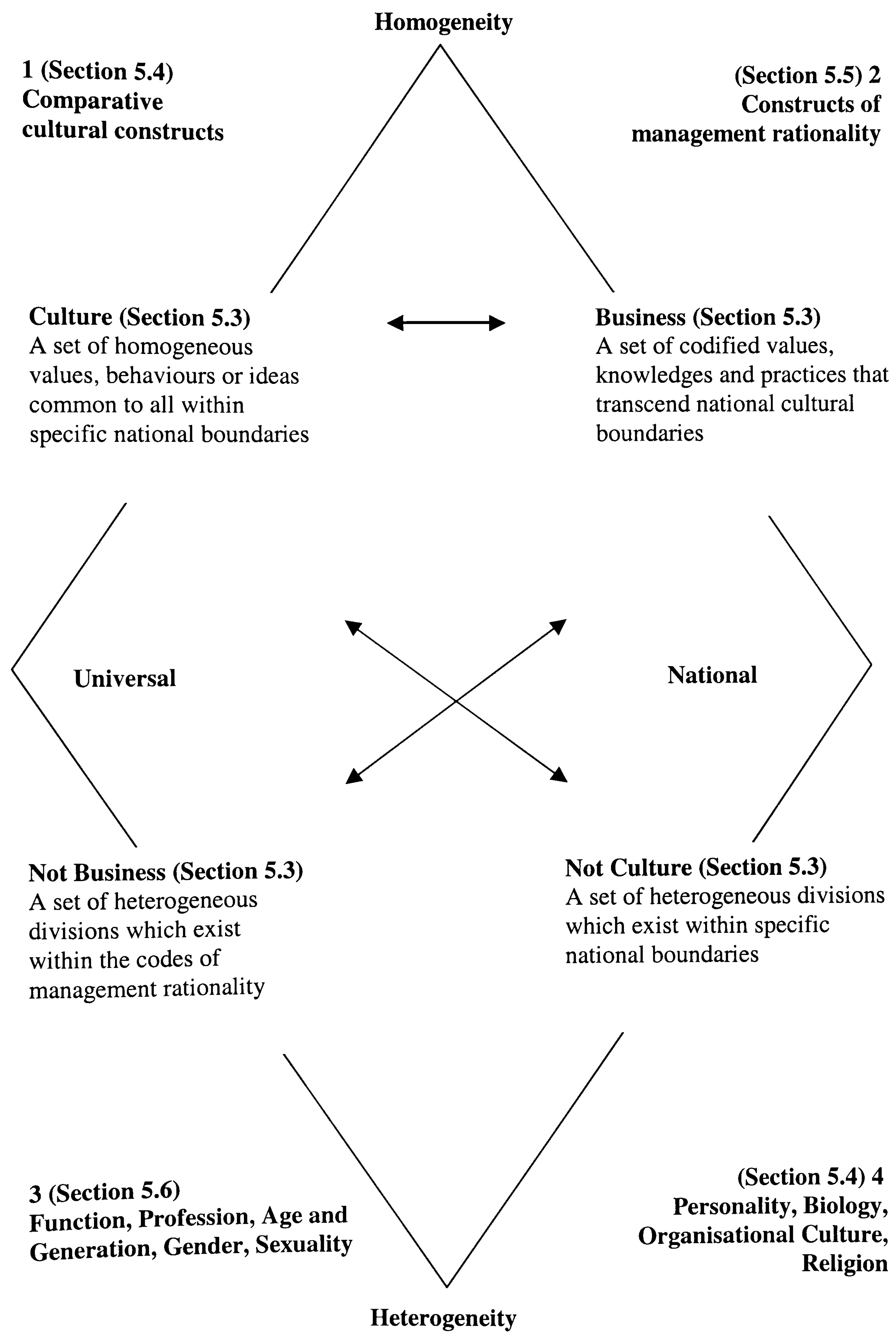
A fundamental division asserted by the managers in making sense of difference related to the role of national culture. Rather than espousing the centrality of national culture in constructions of difference, the managers consistently made the point that culture in fact had little to do with differences between them. The managers were clear about and articulated rigid distinctions between differences which they could attribute to 'national culture' and those which they believed had nothing to do with culture and were merely business or management issues. This is not to say that they did not articulate any cultural differences which they thought existed between themselves, merely that they believed the majority of 'differences' between them were a function of their business relationship.

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provides an extended set of semiotic categories of analysis.



Figure 5.2: Semiotic Divisions of Difference



During the first Service Meeting in Scotland for example, about a quarter of the way through the proceedings, and having sat quietly at the table observing, I was brought into the conversation and thus explicitly into the flow of the meeting for the first time. Dieter, Bergbau's service manager, asked me about my project and what I expected to find. The full transcript of this episode is contained in Appendix Two, and a summary of it in Table 5.3.1 below. It was recorded on Tape 5A and is contained within the main transcript on pages 24-25.

*Table 5.3.1: The Technical Point of View*

<b>Lines 1-20:</b>	Dieter asks me what I am studying, what I expect to find and what I will do with my work. I reply that I am interested in the role of culture and cultural stereotypes in business. I give examples of punctuality and precision as stereotypes of Germans. I assert the view that these stereotypes are barriers to good business.
<b>Lines 21-37:</b>	Somewhat cryptically, Dieter suggests that some things transcend cultural boundaries. He goes on to ask whether the project belongs to the discipline of economics or psychology. I reply that it belongs to international management and attempt to clarify his previous utterance. Dieter then asks whether I will build the results into a management training course. I reply "partly", but suggest that its findings are primarily of academic value.
<b>Lines 38-47:</b>	Cameron interjects and suggests that the common denominator of business is money-making and this imperative serves to level the cultural terrain. I respond positively to Cameron's suggestion and suggest the value of management training.
<b>Lines 48-61:</b>	Dieter asserts that research on the differences between Europeans and Indians, Indonesians and Chinese would be more complicated. Fritz gives an example of the differences between a typical German banker and an American one. I tell them that much research has been done into US-Japanese and Chinese cultural difference.
<b>Lines 62-72:</b>	Cameron asks me about research into Scottish and English cultural difference and suggests that there are no differences between him and Pete. Pete notes differences between Glaswegians and Edinburghers. I then note differences between Prussians and Bavarians. Dieter responds to this and then talks about Koreans.

The excerpt of talk below pertains to the second section of the summary and extends from lines 21 to 38 of the transcript in Appendix Two. In it, I have just explained that my interest is in the role of culture in international management and given examples of ways in which Germans are stereotypically represented. Dieter (Tape 5A, Transcript pp. 24-25) then responds:

*Dieter:* The technical point of view is that 2 and the other 2 must be 4. It's not something that is very easy to work out. Will you be saying you are right, you are wrong, it was like that? In which connection? What is your business? What are you studying? Economics or psychology?



*Researcher:* It's international management that I teach and this is my doctoral thesis so in broad terms, it's international management. When you talk about 2 plus 2 being 4 is that necessarily an indication of you stereotypically being German, you want to know the answer or does it not really matter where you go in the world, two and two will always equal four?

*Dieter:* Two plus two can be between 1.7 and 39, so this is the difference.

In the turns presented above I tried to establish what Dieter meant when he talked about the 'technical point of view'. Given that the immediate context for this comment was the role of the cultural in international management, the quote suggests that Dieter, by way of contrast to the previous utterance, is pointing to a category of knowledge which is not culturally specific, but homogeneously meaningful across all national cultures. In this particular case, he suggests that arithmetic codes and the numbers which comprise them transcend cultural boundaries and are therefore a form of universal knowledge. It might be suggested therefore that the 'technical point of view', according to Dieter at least, is the binary opposite of the 'cultural point of view' outlined by me in previous utterances in this episode. It is a category of knowledge which is universal in its scope and understanding, and which defines itself in a dialectic relation with the cultural.

A further instantiation of this division by Dieter is found in the post-meeting interview which I conducted with him and Hans. This particular example pertains to an issue specifically related to the Bigtruck/Bergbau relationship. When questioned about how they perceived the relationship between Bergbau and Bigtruck, both Dieter and Hans complained that Bigtruck frequently took too long to provide technical solutions for faulty trucks. I asked them whether they thought there were any cultural issues involved in this situation. They replied (Tape 9B, Transcript p. 7):

*Hans:* No.

*Dieter:* No, no, no, no, no, no. This is one symptom of the business as it is. We have similar problems with another Italian company with more excavators, those blue ones you see on road constructions. It would be silly to say no, they are typical Scotsmen, they don't spend their money or whatever.

Just like numbers and arithmetic codes, technical solutions and, in this case, the engineering and organisational codes to which they belong, are not regarded as cultural, rather they are simple business issues which extend universally as much to Scottish organisations as they do to Italian ones. Technical solutions, and the time and money they expend, form an important part of a code of business which is accepted and practised universally. This is made abundantly clear in particular by Dieter's insistent repetition of 'no' and his whimsical dismissal of the cultural in this issue.

However, it is not just the German managers who assert the existence of an a-cultural code of business knowledge. Cameron, Bigtruck's service support manager, also instantiates a form of a-cultural code, similar to Dieter's technical point of view. Going back briefly to the episode which I discussed previously, Cameron interjects in line 38 (Tape 5A, Transcript p. 25) with the following:

Where is the levelling off of that (...) the business. Because (...) Hans is purely motivated in making money for the company, the same as we are (...) which is the common denominator. That really for me is the levelling off.

Of particular interest in this quote are the phrases 'levelling off' and 'common denominator'. Not only does it provide further evidence of an implicit managerial division between cultural codes and business codes, Cameron also seems to be suggesting that it is possible to get *beyond* culture to some kind of essence which lies at the heart of the relationship between Bigtruck and Bergbau, in this instance money. He is suggesting that the social reality of organisation can be reduced to a set of business practices 'motivated' by the desire to 'make money' rather than a set of practices codified in any way culturally. One might say that for Cameron, 'business' is the 'real' stuff in which he deals, not culture. This sentiment is also present within the following quote by Cameron, expressed in an interview after Service Meeting Four (Tape 28A, Transcript p. 92):



I would rather look at the thing as a business association with business problems rather (...) and get the problems on the table and deal with them rather than accentuate the cultural thing (...). One of the best things to learn from a business perspective is stand alone (...) like Dieter. We are simply struggling with resource and the priority of things. There are many things on the minutes that I would expect a normal distributor to do as a distributor function. I want to move the business further with Bergbau, but we have got to have a consensus with them as how we do go forward and add value and meet the customers' demands.

Cameron's preferred frame of reference on his dealings with Bergbau is defined by codes of 'effective management' rather than culture. In Cameron's performance of management rationality, the implicit desirability of 'effective management' contained within phrases such as 'going forward' and 'adding value' serves to render culture secondary to business. The quote suggests that culture is simply an unnecessary diversion from the gritty realities of business, and discussion of it ought to be minimal. In this case, culture is viewed as grit in the well-oiled machine of capitalism. Extending this interpretation, there is an important political and as such ethical issue implicit in this binary opposition. Cameron's notion of 'levelling off' serves to privilege business codes as of higher importance to managers, thus rendering less important and 'inferior' cultural codes. As I outline in greater depth in section 5.5, this privileging of business codes involves its positing as an inherently desirable social and organisational discourse, a normative guide for conducting business and an objective and ethically neutral domain of knowledge. In short, as well as illuminating an interesting division between culture and business, the managers are also, both explicitly and implicitly, assigning a relative importance and a relative value to each code.

### **5.3.1 Contexts of intercultural awareness**

I move now to consider the contexts within which this division is manifest and in which it circulates. The division between culture and business was not articulated on each and every occasion I was present in the organisations. In addition to the data exhibited above, which has been reconstructed from the first Service Meeting, the only other

context in which this division is accorded concerted attention is in Service Meeting Four, the final one of the project. What is common in both these contexts is the role that I played in inducing the managers to articulate explicitly how they carve up the intercultural space in which they work into divisions of difference. In Service Meeting One my sheer presence made the managers naturally curious about what it was I was studying, even the Bigtruck managers who had already been introduced to me and knew, at least to some initial extent, what I was doing. Telling them that I was interested in culture seemed to have an important effect. It served to raise an awareness of the intercultural nature of their business and thus led them to reflect consciously on how they constructed this organisational reality as an intercultural space in ways they might not otherwise have done. As such my presence and my presentation of self during the meeting was paramount in the emergence of the culture-business division as I forced the managers to see their world in a particular way by placing an intercultural discourse into their frame of reference. Just as dialogue might be described as being consciously 'gendered' or 'raced', I had 'interculturated' this part of the meeting in order to encourage the managers to reflect on how they 'write' their social 'texts' interculturally. This suggests therefore that, in this case at least, the culture-business division is only articulated explicitly in contexts which have an awareness of their own interculturality. This awareness results in a reflective dialogue during which the managers socially construct a terrain of difference by mobilising divisions of the cultural and the non-cultural.

To illustrate this argument, I turn now to some dialogue from Service Meeting Four, the last meeting that I attended. The dialogue between myself, Cameron and Pete emanates from our post-meeting interview. The context to this meeting is crucial in understanding this example as reflective intercultural dialogue. Six weeks before this



meeting I had sent the final report on my research to the HR Director in Bigtruck who had subsequently circulated it not only to all those involved in my project including Cameron and Pete, but also to the entire senior management team. Having been requested by the HR Director at the very beginning of my fieldwork to address explicitly the role of cultural difference in Bigtruck's dealing with Bergbau, the report contained comment on a number of differences, some of which I attributed to culture, some of which I did not. In writing this report I relied explicitly on my empirical material and therefore on the culture-business division. Both Cameron and Pete had read this report before Service Meeting Four and it therefore formed the central talking point of the post-meeting interview. The fact they had both read the report served to raise their awareness of the cultural and non-cultural nature of their business and resulted in the reflective dialogue detailed below during which they both mobilised and re-articulated the organising division of culture-business. Pete begins the interview as follows (Tape 28A, Transcript p. 86):

*Pete:* After we finished the last meeting I got the impression from you that you agreed with my assessment that there wasn't basically any difference between us.

*Researcher:* Right.

*Pete:* The difference was that we were different people and that we worked for different companies and I thought that was basically it, but the report seems to come across that there are a lot of differences. Or did I pick that up wrong?

*Researcher:* There were a few I thought.

*Pete:* But I thought that we'd agreed that basically there wasn't a great cultural divide between us as far as business was concerned.

*Researcher:* Sure those are my feelings that culture is pretty much used to hang your hat on.

*Pete:* I mean the difference is that, you know, we are different people anyway and that we work for two different companies, you know there's the historical thing that they were a manufacturer at one time and now they are if you like a dealer or a sub-dealer or whatever you want to call it.

In this episode Pete asserts a number of divisions between him and Cameron and their German counterparts. First of all the culture-business division is centrally mobilised by him as evidenced by his reference to ‘cultural differences’ on the one hand (culture), and ‘different companies’ and ‘the historical thing’ on the other (business). A further division which must not be overlooked, and which I discuss later in this chapter, relates to differences in personality, made clear when Pete says ‘we are different people’. What Pete is deploying here is a division between personality and culture in order to assert that it is not so much national culture which makes them different, just their individual personalities. More importantly, however, these divisions are being reproduced as part of a *consciously reflective dialogue* on difference propagated by my report, a kind of ‘meta-dialogue’ on national culture. What this interview demonstrates is the social negotiation of boundaries between the cultural and the non-cultural. The kind of social negotiation illustrated in the above case was not however entered into ‘freely’ by the participants, but was a product of the intercultural context propagated by my report.

In closing this section, the managers articulated a rigid distinction between differences which they considered cultural and those which were purely business-related, as expressed in Dieter’s ‘technical point of view’ or Cameron’s ‘levelling off’. The majority of differences, they claimed, were business issues. In terms of the contexts in which this central division was articulated, it seemed that it was conditions of conscious reflection on culture which served to produce the opposition culture-business. Reflective dialogue therefore provides the existential conditions for this division. In sum then, section 5.3 should already alert us to the possibility that difference is not an objective category of analysis. On the one hand it shows that the organisation of what could be labelled as ‘cultural difference’ is dependent upon the managers’ capacity for the social construction and mapping of things which count as culture and things which



do not. This mapping is the product of the ways in which the managers place linguistic boundaries and thereby insert divisions into interaction which carve up their world into these meaningful categories. It is thus difficult to consider it an 'objectivist' construct. To complicate this matter further, the section also flagged up the ways in which context has an effect on the specific insertion of divisions in social action, a point which underscores the need to explore local constructions of difference.

Having outlined the opposition central to my semiotic square, in the next two sections I will consider in more depth and in turn the second-order concepts which can be derived from it, namely 'cultural' (categories one and four of the square) and 'business' (categories two and three of the square) difference. Before outlining each side of this opposition, I should like to repeat the point which I made at the beginning of this chapter that whilst I use the semiotic square as a hermeneutic tool, I do not subscribe to the structuralist underpinnings which it conventionally takes. Apart from theoretical reasons for this, my reading of the empirical data suggests certain difficulties with the 'fixity of the sign' which structuralist takes on difference inevitably imply. In this regard, the following sections will show that whilst this binary might appear to be 'hard-edged', stable and even obvious to the managers, they contain within them contradictory, contested and shifting materials whose instability has been suppressed by the agency of the social actors. Section 5.4 begins by looking at the managers' constructions of cultural difference.

#### **5.4 Comparative Cultural Constructs**

Although the managers believed then that cultural difference was secondary to business difference in their organisational realities, this does not mean that they did not engage in talk or reflection on the forms that cultural difference took. In this section I give examples of the ways in which the managers constructed cultural difference and offer

comment on the contextually contingent nature of these forms. Sub-section 5.4.1 begins by looking at the role of national culture in manifestations of cultural difference and illustrates how this primarily found expression in the deployment of comparative constructs of Self and Other. An important point to emanate from the fieldwork however was that cultural difference had fluid boundaries and was not necessarily always tied to culturally homogeneous nation-states as suggested by many international management researchers. The managers were able to articulate culture as a necessarily heterogeneous construct. And to re-iterate the final point from the close of section 5.3 their heterogeneous organisation of difference rendered it a construct which continually disorganised itself.

#### **5.4.1 The boundaries of culture**

In order to substantiate these latter points, we return first of all to Service Meeting One and re-examine the examples of cultural difference given by the managers in the episode of talk summarised previously in figure 5.3.1 and transcribed fully in Appendix Two. The excerpt of talk presented below refers to sections three and four of the summary, lines 48-72 (Tape 5A, Transcript pp. 25-26):

*Dieter:* Something like that has been done between other cultures, because I would suppose very much that the difference between Europeans and let's say Indians or Indonesian people or maybe people from China things like that would be very much more complicated.

*Fritz:* For example if a German banker wants to have a job in the States then this is also a problem because a German banker is a typical German banker who looks very anxious. He does not want to say, he does not respond just careful, opposite what an American banker is. We expect someone who thinks on his own, knows what he wants and so if a German banker wants to have a job in the States then normally this does not work because it's something totally different from what the American would expect. It is an important problem. So they look more to their social behaviour and typical behaviour than their knowledge because knowledge is something you can learn but behaviour is something that is born. Culture is vital therefore this is a very interesting study.

*Researcher:* A lot of what has been done is Americans and Chinese or Japanese. This at first sight is an easier study because the differences are so pronounced.



*Cameron:* What about Scots and English culture?

*Researcher:* That might be my next thing. You could even go as far as in Scotland itself.

*Cameron:* I don't perceive there's any difference in my outlook from Pete's, I really don't.

*Pete:* There are difference between Edinburghers and Glaswegians.

*Researcher:* I know a couple of people who work in different subsidiaries of IBM and Hewlett Packard in different parts of this country. They notice differences. It's the same in Germany, you might notice the difference between a Bavarian and a Prussian.

*Dieter:* I was going to say that. He (referring to Hans) is close to Bavaria but not a typical Bavarian. For a Korean it is important not to lose face in front of his boss.

*Cameron:* I don't know what the stereotype behaviour is for Bavarians, it is very stereotypes, they just fall into the same position every time.

To me, there are several elements of note in this episode of talk. Firstly there are many instances of cultural difference given by Dieter, Fritz and Cameron, between Europeans and Asians (Indians, Indonesians and Chinese), Germans and Americans, Americans and the Japanese/Chinese, the Scots and the English, people from Edinburgh and Glasgow, the Bavarians and the Prussian. Collecting these together it is noticeable that there are differences in terms of the divisions used by the managers to construct culture and thus cultural difference. On the one hand Fritz and Cameron assimilate a culture with a nation-state, in other words they assume that the nation-states they nominate possess homogeneous cultures. On the other hand both Pete and Dieter point to cultural differences which they believe exist within national boundaries, in Pete's case between Edinburgh and Glasgow, and in Dieter's between Bavaria and Prussians. Looking outwith national borders, Dieter even draws a comparison between 'the Europeans' and a trio of Asian nations thereby creating a kind of cultural homogeneity between the nations that comprise Europe, whichever they may be. What this suggests is that culture

has fluid boundaries. It need not always refer to a unitary nation-state, although the managers commonly constructed it as such in the meetings and interviews, but to places and people both within and across national borders.

There are two further points worthy of some note. Firstly, there is the idea expressed by Dieter that some differences are 'more complicated' or as I paraphrase it more 'pronounced' than others, in this case those between Europeans and Asians. This suggests that for Dieter there exists a kind of hierarchy of cultural difference with some differences being more obvious and more accented than others. Difference is thus a matter of degree as much as it is a matter of kind. In critical relation to Dieter's comments however, one might speculate that there is nothing inherent in varieties of Asian culture which makes them necessarily so different from European ones. Rather one could interpret Dieter's statement from the discursive perspective offered by Said's *Orientalism*, arguing that his notion that Asian culture is more different is simply a discursive effect brought about through the exoticisation and mysticism of the East by Westerners. Dieter's hierarchy can thus be seen as a discursive effect.

The second point of note in the turns documented above is the diversity in managers' notions of what constitutes culture. Fritz for example clearly articulates his belief that it is '(social) behaviour' rather than 'knowledge' which is cultural. Cameron is less definite in his notion of culture, talking about 'outlook', which might be suggested to be essentially cognitive or ideational in nature, and '(stereotype) behaviour'. It is possible to assert therefore that to managers, culture can take duplicitous forms be it ideational or behavioural, or even both. Culture has no fixed or definite form, but can plausibly take form in a variety of ways.



What this discussion indicates then is that culture possesses neither an agreed or unitary boundary (i.e., it does not simply equate to the boundaries of a nation-state) nor an agreed or unitary form (i.e., participants believed it to reside in multiplicitous forms). There exists a variety of differentiated cultural values and forms both within and outwith any given geographical boundaries, thus suggesting that national culture is only one resource amongst several others for the construction of difference. To illustrate this further, sections 5.4.2 to 5.4.5 give examples from the data of divisions that are mobilised by the participants when questioning claims that ‘cultural’ difference takes a homogeneous form within specific national geographical boundaries. These divisions correspond to category three of the semiotic square.

#### **5.4.2 The cultural versus the individual**

In tempering claims of the homogeneity of culture, the division most commonly deployed by the managers was that between the cultural and the individual. For the participants, the reason that some people were different was not because they came from a different culture, but because of their personality. Difference lay in their individuality, not their culture. Pete’s quote from Service Meeting Four which I presented earlier in this chapter is indicative of exactly this sentiment. To re-iterate briefly Pete was challenging some of the findings I presented in my management report and questioning the role of cultural difference in accounting for the differences which I observed. On this point he says (Tape 28A, Transcript p. 86):

The difference was that we were different people and that we worked for different companies and I thought that was basically it.

Pete’s reference to ‘different people’ implies that it was not a collective culture which provided the resource for difference, but individual personalities and identities. Within the data, this point was consistently and strongly substantiated in the ways in which both Cameron and Pete constructed the identity of Hans, one of Bergbau’s service managers.

Indeed in response to Pete's question to me about the role of culture in the business, Cameron retorts that (Tape 28A, Transcript p. 87):

I think that putting cultural differences aside I can very much understand where Dieter is coming from. He speaks a language that I understand, I understand exactly where I stand with him and vice-versa. But with the other protagonist I would say that it's very difficult to understand where he's coming from at times and I don't think that's cultural, I think that's just the way the guy's personality is. And what his perception of what we are to him differs you know. Spending endless amounts of time in detail, going into areas that are not necessarily going to push the business forward.

In this quotation Cameron immediately puts the notion of culture to one side and proceeds to 'divide' the identities of Dieter and Hans by commenting on their individual personalities. On the one hand Cameron clearly identifies with Dieter on a personal level, in spite of their divergent cultural backgrounds. As I point out later in this chapter when Cameron says 'he speaks a language that I understand', he is referring to discourses of management. In other words he is identifying personally with Dieter through the deployment of a professional affiliation. On the other hand Cameron has clear difficulties dealing with Hans, a point which became abundantly clear during the 18-month research study. He regularly complained about Hans's pedantry, long-windedness, constant questioning, lack of prioritisation, lack of concern for commercial issues *inter alia*. And for Cameron this had nothing to do with his German nationality, but was purely a result of his personality. However it was not just Cameron who expressed this opinion. Pete too was of the same mind as Cameron, referring to Hans as 'a paper engineer' and 'having no overview of the situation'.

These personal differences between Cameron, Pete and Hans frequently resulted in some very strong language and colourful representations. For example during a break in Service Meeting Three, in the absence of Hans, Pete says (Tape 21B, Transcript p. 33):

*Pete:* He's a fuckin' pain in the ass. We're making such a fuckin' song and dance about things. Thank God we don't have to work with them every day.



*Cameron:* Why do we not get this from anyone else?

*Pete:* He's the difference.

Pete's final turn here encapsulates very nicely the way in which Hans as an individual, rather than as a German, becomes the repository of difference and thereby shows how the managers were able to draw boundaries between the cultural and the individual. As Pete retorts 'Hans is just Hans'.

### **4.3 Organisational Culture**

Notions of organisational culture also provided a resource for constructing difference. In this regard, difference was seen to lie in a set of values and practices which characterised all organisations within Germany. Whether these organisational practices were indicative of a wider German national culture was never specified by the managers. What they did make clear however was that this 'culture' was not applicable to all social actors within Germany, merely to German corporations. In Service Meeting Three for example, Bigtruck's field engineer Erwin Beilstein talks of the 'cover your back mentality' which is becoming an increasingly conspicuous feature of corporate life in Germany and which, he suggests, prevails within the Bergbau organisation. He cites the example of the high demand for information amongst German corporations as an indication of the fear they have that they may be litigated against and thus evidence of this mentality.

Having information, he says (not recorded), is a way of ensuring that:

(...) you have every angle covered. If you have every angle covered you will not be held accountable for anything.

Erwin goes on to mobilise this facet of German organisational culture when talking about Hans. He suggests that Hans's pedantry and constant questioning is simply a function of the organisational culture in which he works. As such he asserts that it is

not so much a question of Hans's personality as much as it is a matter of the wider environment in which he works. Hans is thus reduced to a product of his organisational environment. The only other example of a 'difference' which is explicitly linked to organisational culture and related to Erwin's previous comments, is that of the extent to which responsibility in the Bergbau organisation is collectively rather than personally assumed. In an interview with Cameron for example, he states that (Tape 28A, Transcript p. 91):

(...) if I sit and construct a fax that has got statements on it, the company accepts liability for it, I accept (...) I don't come here to get a countersignature on it, I just send it. I make that decision myself and I take that responsibility myself, but every fax that comes from Germany has got two or three signatures on it. That's a difference. It's the way they do business. There's no (...) I have probably said all that before, they just operate differently from us. I assume responsibility as part of my job, they don't.

According to Cameron the managers within Bergbau will never take responsibility for issues on a personal level. They will always require the support of other colleagues in taking responsibility, as evidenced in the above case by the need for countersignatures of documents. Cameron makes it clear that this difference is not something which is culturally conditioned, but simply a facet of the way the organisation operates.

#### **5.4.4 The cultural versus the biological**

A further extension of the argument that in some cases difference is purely individual rather than cultural is contained within the following quote from Pete. This is an off the cuff remark which he makes over dinner at the Pfefferkorn restaurant in Dortmund and provides the final summation of a discussion we were having about Hans.

It's not to do with culture, it's in the genes.

The reason I suggest that this is an extension of the argument about individuality is that, rather than talking about individual difference as a matter of personality, Pete takes recourse to the essentialism of biology as a resource of individuality. It can be



suggested therefore that the division of the cultural from the individual is in turn related to the division between personality and biology.

#### **5.4.5 Religious divisions**

The last three sections have shown the ways in which the managers articulated the role of national culture in their notions of difference. The data contains instances of a variety of divisions which the managers deploy in problematising the claim that national culture is a homogeneous construct which applies uniformly to all those living within a specific set of geographical boundaries. For instance, the managers articulate examples of cultural differences contained within nation-states, of the division between the cultural and the individual and the biological, and of the role of organisational culture as a vehicle of difference. A further example from the data which illustrates ‘intranational’ difference involves religious divisions. In this regard, the following episode emanates from Service Meeting One and punctures a complex technical discussion about radiator failures.

Hans had just asked Cameron when the factory would be closing for Christmas. Cameron replies ‘Christmas Eve’ and goes on to say that just a few years previously the factory had even been open on Christmas day. Hans found this difficult to believe, saying ‘Come off it’, to which Cameron responds (Tape 7A, Transcript p. 51):

*Cameron:* No, my father used to go to work every Christmas Eve, it was never a holiday here until 15 years ago. It was always New Year that was the holiday then we got Anglified and started taking Christmas as well. (Hans laughs)

*Hans:* You became christened. But you know with the opening of the border in Germany you come across so many people who are atheists and who eh (...).

*Cameron:* That surprises me somewhat because that is where Luther originated there.

*Hans:* You can see what the system can do to you and a certain proportionism and God knows what reasons they were watching you, big brother watching you, big brother in particular (...). For instance they have a Jugendweihe, a youth

sort of festivity instead of what we know in Catholic families as Holy Communion or Confirmation for the Protestants.

*Dieter:* You are probably better having an atheist who is friendly and open than having somebody who is running the Church confesses sins.

*Hans:* Definitely. I was only remarking on the fact you know that formerly, before the wall was erected, it was virtually the same on either side you see and all of a sudden.

*Dieter:* But I would say (...) (Cameron interrupts).

*Cameron:* You see religion is a massive issue in this country. There's a heck of a lot of (...) at work we never discuss it with people, there is a great divide in the West of Scotland between Protestant and Catholic. Catholics are traditionally distrusted because of their affiliation to Rome and it's not bad where Gavin comes from, but here it's the west of Scotland, there's a lot of Irish, a lot of the Southern Irish people came here during the Industrial Revolution and settled in the West of Scotland.

To me, this episode contains several interesting elements. The first interesting element is the managers' deployment of religious divisions in differentiating their societies. Hans for example differentiates the former West and East Germany by demarcating the former as a religious society, through his reference to Catholicism and Protestantism and the latter as a broadly 'non-religious' society, through his reference to the large number of 'atheists' who crossed the border after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Similarly Cameron points to the deep and 'emotive' divisions between Catholics and Protestants in Scotland. A second interesting element is the way in which the managers deploy religious divisions with reference to specific historical contexts. On the one hand we have Hans who points to the historical legacy of Communism on the religious faith of the former East Germans, asserting that 'before the wall was erected, it was virtually the same on either side'. On the other hand we have Cameron who talks about the immigration of the southern Irish to Scotland at the time of the Industrial Revolution and the concomitant rise of the Catholic population in the West of Scotland. It was the historical legacy of this religious development, he goes on to suggest, which had fostered mutual mistrust between Catholics and Protestants. Here we see the



intersections of religious and historical divisions. A third and final point of note in the previous episode is the challenge made by Dieter to the implicit 'authority' and 'desirability' of having a religious faith expressed by Hans, and to some extent perhaps by Cameron. This implicit authority and desirability takes form in the implicit value judgements in Hans's representation of the religious affiliations of the former East Germans. Specifically he seems to be suggesting in his turns that the East Germans had something 'good' and 'worthy' taken away from them with the establishment of the purportedly atheist Communist regime. In suggesting this Hans is propagating religion as a form of staple and desirable social material and a source of moral sustenance and direction. Certainly this would seem to be the interpretation that Dieter has made of Hans's comment when he interjects the conversation with a tempering comment about those of a religious persuasion.

In short then the managers in my study were able to articulate several instances of cultural heterogeneity within national boundaries by deploying a variety of different divisions (religious, individual, biological, organisational). However, this is not to suggest that there were not instances when the managers did mobilise cultural difference as a homogenising concept possessing rigid national boundaries. Indeed I have already presented examples of just such constructions earlier e.g. Fritz's comparison of the Germans and the Americans. What is interesting about these latter examples is that they make explicit, although somewhat brief, reference to an identifiable Self as well as an identifiable Other. An analysis of the data suggests however that constructs of national cultural difference for the most part only involved an explicit and detailed account of the Other. In this respect, there are several instances in my data where the participants outline their notions of 'the Germans', 'the French', 'the Spanish', 'the Chinese'. Given the Anglo-German focus of my study the majority of these constructions relate to the

Germans. In the next section, I outline the various ways in which participants' constructions of 'the Germans' provide instantiations of cultural difference based on a homogenising notion of culture, thus taking us back to category one of the semiotic square.

#### **5.4.6 The Germans**

First some explanatory notes. There are very few instances in my transcripts where the German managers I researched described what they thought of as 'the British', or 'the Scottish', or gave examples of cultural differences they had noticed between themselves and their Scottish counterparts. The reason for this is that I spent the majority of my time with the Bigtruck managers and approached the research from within Bigtruck. I therefore had little opportunity to collect the same number of national cultural descriptions from the German side as I did from the Scottish side. This is the reason why I concentrate exclusively on constructions of 'the Germans' in this section. A further point of note here is that I have also decided to use data from interviews I conducted with other Bigtruck employees rather than just those conducted with Cameron and Pete. I do this firstly to give a wider view of 'the Germans' from the Bigtruck standpoint, but also to show the broad similarities between the different participants' constructions.

When articulating their constructions of 'the Germans', the participants at Bigtruck drew on a variety of social and organisational resources. The most commonly used resource in accounting for difference was personal experience where participants would describe Germans whom they knew or had known in the past, frequently commenting on the extent to which they perceived these acquaintances to be 'typical' Germans or otherwise. As for the origin of these acquaintances, although one interviewee explicitly mentioned a German whom he had met through his family, all the participants described



Germans whom they had met whilst doing business either for Bigtruck or a previous employer. As such it can be said that organisational relations provided a primary and fundamental source for social constructions of the Other. Richard Daley, Bigtruck's parts manager, for example, constructs his notion of a 'typical' German with more than explicit reference to the intercultural, organisational relations in which he works. He comments (Tape 10B, Transcript p. 5):

(...) Schwamm is probably more of what I would say typically German, a bit into shouting and thinks if he screams loud enough things will happen (...). I suppose my perception of the average German, basing more on my dealings with Bergbau rather than Fasielko, they tend to be more (...) they're quite pedantic about things you know. When they get something in their mind that they want, they want to go from A to B, then that's what they want to do, and they don't want to go via C, they want to go from A to B, they're quite pedantic about that. They approach things, and I hesitate to use the word, in almost a logical manner, they look upon it and say why would you want to do something different when this is clearly the best way to do it (...). That's my perception of a typical German.

Similarly, Pete draws his picture of a 'typical German' with specific and unprimed recourse to organisational collegiacy (Tape 3A, Transcript p. 1):

*Pete:* (...) Hans is not a typical German, because he has a sense of humour, and Dieter perhaps is more of a typical German (...) except that he's not.

*Researcher:* What's your notion of a typical German?

*Pete:* Don't have a great sense of humour, (...) they like every pound of flesh (...) the feeling with them that they all like to create a sense of guilt, sense of animosity towards Britain (...).

Both the above quotations clearly rely on Richard and Pete's personal knowledge of Germans with whom they work as a resource. In Richard's case, he willingly offers his description. Pete, by contrast, having alluded to his own construction of the typical German by defining what it is not, has to be asked to articulate his notion more explicitly. Exploring these constructions in more detail, there are a number of disparate social and organisational materials drawn upon. Richard for example talks of German ire, pedantry, logic, aloofness. Pete of the German sense of humour. Other interviews carried out during the research repeat some of these issues and add others. The most

common social material utilised, presented above in Richard's quotation, is the construction of the Germans as 'demanding'. Bigtruck's parts sales assistant George, for example reflects on his dealings with Germans (Tape 1A, Transcript p. 11):

I can find them quite demanding, and want things on time. They want things, Germans, as being precise. There are exact order times, they like things on time. As far as that's concerned, I have an idea in my head, most people do, and they live up to that in real life.

For George, then, his expectations of what Germans would be like have been borne out in his organisational experience. He finds the people with whom he works from Bergbau both demanding and precise. However, it is not just the Scots who construct the Germans as demanding. Bigtruck's native German sales assistant Stefan also articulates this point in an interview. He remarks (Tape 18A, Transcript p. 7):

They are a funny race and you just need to know the German habits and it's quite easy or easier for people to deal with Germans (...) (they are) very, very demanding. You just have to understand this.

This quote is interesting since it demonstrates that even a German national, when encouraged to think about how he would describe any pertinent cultural differences, points to the same defining trait. Apart from the demanding character of the Germans, the other most common resource for participants' constructions, which was addressed directly by Pete, referred to their sense of humour. In an interview with Cameron, where he talks about his German brother-in-law, the issue of humour is important (Tape 11A, Transcript p. 9).

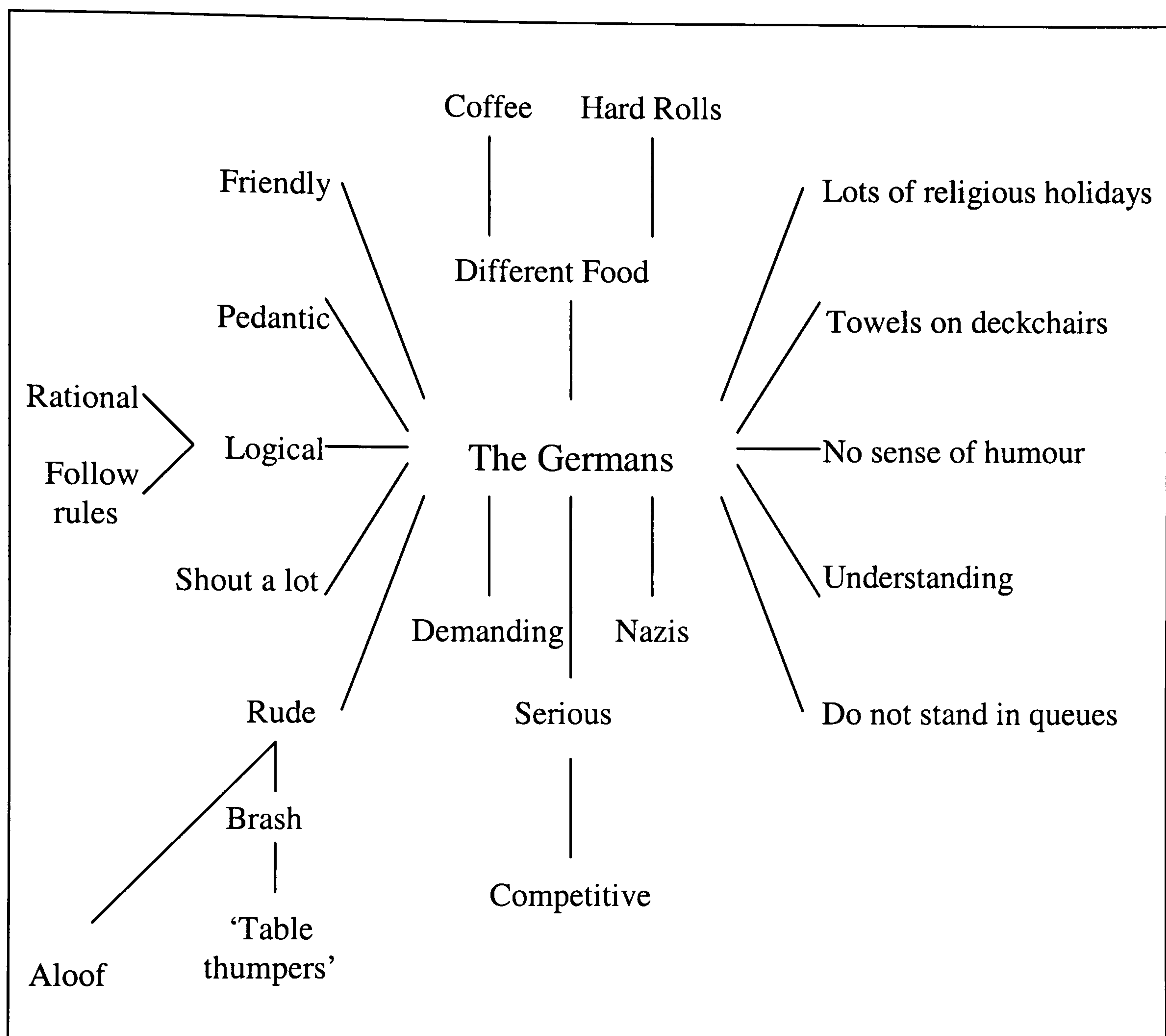
I've got family that are German, my brother-in-law and whilst he is devoid of a sense of humour, everything is serious with him. A guy once said to me that a joke is a very serious manner in Germany and he's right, you know he is. If you make an off-the-cuff remark you know in a sort of UK style, 'why?' (...) Playing at games, you know very serious and tense, even if you are playing a friendly game of tennis or something like that. They've always got to win, a great lust for winning and when you're joking about things, you know, things would just go right over the top of their head and they'd pick up on that: what do you mean? Why are you saying that? They're definitely a different race.



Apart from brief allusions to German seriousness and competitiveness, the German lack of a sense of humour is clearly central to Cameron's construction. This interpretation of the centrality of humour might be reinforced by considering that this is the one and only time that Cameron consciously reflects on what he thought constituted the typical German. Having said this there were also other occasions outside the context of interviews and meetings when Cameron passed a brief, but notable remark on German humour. For example in 'backstage' contexts such as the hotel bar in Dortmund or the airport lobby in Düsseldorf, Cameron made invariably sarcastic comments on what he perceived to be German humour, sparked by things which he had seen, heard or read e.g. a TV ad, a neighbour's conversation on the plane. This seems to tell us that constructions of the Other are frequently provoked by one's mere presence within the cultural and linguistic environment of the Other. 'Sensing' difference visually, aurally or olfactorily seems to act as a resource which is transformed by social actors in textual constructions of Otherness.

Having outlined two of the most important resources for the construction of Germans (their demanding nature and their lack of humour), I do not wish to present each and every type of social material which exists within my data. Rather I draw your attention to figure 5.4.6 which attempts to bring together the disparate materials mobilised by participants in my interviews and meetings. It attempts to present the wider social semiotic of what constitutes 'Germanness' through the use of metonymic associations. I hope it demonstrates that the construction and signification of cultural difference resides in a variety of social, organisational and historical resources ranging from behavioural patterns and eating habits to more traditionally stereotypical representations of the Other.

Figure 5.4.6: The Germans



Rather than engage in an overextended account of what the Scottish participants said the Germans were ‘like’, I would like to underline two key points about the way in which the managers organised the above sociocultural materials in constructing their notions of ‘the Germans’. These two points allow us to begin to qualify some of the approaches to difference outlined in previous chapters. The first of these points relates to the kinds of Self-Other dichotomy in which the cultural comparisons presented in section 5.4.1 could be seen to reside. Whereas section 5.4.1 made reference to the managers’ constructions of difference based on a *explicit* nomination of both a ‘Self’ and an ‘Other’ (e.g. Germans-Americans, Scots-English), the descriptions of cultural difference accounted



for in this section 5.4.6 *only* make explicit reference to the Other, i.e. the Germans. The Self, and by extension therefore the division of Self and Other, has become invisible as a consequence of this, thereby rendering the Other the *sole* repository or owner of difference. In this case it is 'the German' who is explicitly marked as being different. This does not mean that the Self plays no role in the construction of the Other, merely that the ethnocentricity and contingency of Self in the production of the Other has been masked. As such it is possible to say that whereas cultural difference sometimes resides in comparisons between the Self and the Other, there are also cases in which this comparison is rendered invisible. Comparative constructs can therefore be explicit or implicit depending on the utterance.

The second point which I would like to draw out here about the 'organisation' of the Other relates to the metonymic and synecdochic links illustrated in Figure 5.4.6. These links provide a snapshot of the different materials drawn upon by the managers to construct the Germans. What is interesting about these associations is that although on the surface they create a fairly consistent picture of what it is to be German, there are certain paradoxical metonyms contained within the diagram which contradict the overall 'stability' of the category. Two brief examples from the Figure can be used to illustrate this. Firstly the notion that the 'Germans' are 'table thumpers' who 'shout a lot' and are 'rude' could be contrasted with their metonymic associations as being 'cool', 'aloof' and 'logical'. Secondly they are described in contradictory terms as both 'friendly' as well as 'brash' and 'serious'. It might be suggested therefore that whilst the paradigmatic construction of a category called 'the Germans' might seem to be natural, obvious and importantly 'unitary' to the managers, the brief semiotic mapping of figure 5.4.6 demonstrates that this is a provisional stability which contains within it contradictory and paradoxical elements. As such the category of the Germans is not frictionless, fixed

and uncontested; it might have the appearance of containing homogeneous and untroubled social materials, but this is at the suppression of those contradictory elements which would threaten its appealing glaze. This might be interpreted as a useful example of the potential for social actors to suppress the disorganising elements of their social realities in order to endow the latter with an appearance of fixity, stability and thus certainty. Developing this interpretation, I would like to suggest there is perhaps more merit in pursuing the *syntagmatic* rather than the paradigmatic aspects of language as a useful basis for thinking about the ways in which the simultaneous organisation and disorganisation of identities and difference takes form. It seems that analysing the ways in which the managers create a sense of Otherness through metonymic ordering gives us a way of understanding the contested and multiplicitous nature of this process in more precise linguistic terms. Indeed it might even be seen to provide a way of thinking about what Hall's (1990) notion of 'Being and Becoming' or Cooper's (1990) idea of 'Organization/disorganization' might actually *look like* in terms of the everyday praxis of social reality. I will pick up on this in somewhat greater detail in chapter six.

I would now like to extend this interpretation of the data into the realm of the politics of identity and difference. Whereas the presentation of the data thus far in the chapter has taken a semiotic, interpretative form, highlighting the categories and classifications actors use in their social ordering of the Other, we can re-interpret some of this data from a more critical perspective (that of Said, 1978). Specifically I would like to suggest that the actors' constructions of cultural difference can be seen as discursive effects of a set of specific representations, images and linguistic practices (Said's broad definition of discourse) associated with constructions of the Germans. The use of perceptibly homogeneous comparative constructs, the masking of the Self in the production of the Other, allusions to Nazism and a related semiotic of the Third Reich,



recourse to representations of the Germans on holiday, Germans' demanding and brash nature, are all forms of a wider discourse of 'Germanism' (a neologism I have created from Said's work). In other words rather than simply constructing the Germans voluntarily, what the participants in my research appeared to be doing is drawing from a discourse of 'Germanism' which pervades UK society. Indeed the frequent description of the Germans as a different 'race' is evidence of the discursive effect of colonialism and the attendant homogenisation which it implies, in constructing the Germans. However it is not just with reference to the Germans that the actions of discourse can be exemplified. In order to demonstrate the effects of discourse in the managers' constructions of cultural difference, I turn now to a further example from my data, this time in relation to the Chinese.

#### **5.4.7 The Chinese**

In this sub-section it is my intention to demonstrate the discursive workings of Orientalism, this time with reference to an episode of talk from Service Meeting One. Present during this episode were myself, Pete, Cameron, Dieter, Fritz and Hans. It is initiated by Fritz, Bergbau's sales manager, who rejoins the meeting, after disappearing for a short toilet break. Having sat down only briefly, Fritz notices a framed picture on the wall of the meeting room and gets out of his chair to inspect it more closely. While inspecting the photograph, Pete proffers some information about it (Tape 6A, Transcript p. 33):

*Pete:* We are in China there, Fritz.

*Fritz:* Three gorges?

*Pete:* Three gorges.

The 'three gorges' refers not just to a well-known geographical area of China, but to the Chinese government's accelerated dam programme which is found there. Bigtruck

provides excavators and diggers to the Chinese government for this project. In this particular case it is a photograph and the ensuing narrative around it which sets up the episode examined below. In broad terms, this section of the meeting, for which a full transcript is contained in Appendix Three, falls into four parts as documented in table 5.4.7 below. This episode was recorded on Tape 6A and is contained in the main transcript from pages 33 to 35. The comparative constructs instantiated in this episode are Chinese culture on the one hand and a broadly articulated European culture on the other.

**Table 5.4.7: The Chinese**

<b>Lines 1-7</b>	Pete asserts the view that the damming programme being undertaken at the three gorges is a potential environmental disaster.
<b>Lines 8-13</b>	Hans draws parallels between Chinese attitudes to such a potential catastrophe and their attitudes to human rights. More specifically he suggests that since the Chinese do not care about human rights, they are, by implication, not likely to care about any potential ecological disaster.
<b>Lines 13-28</b>	Pete then moves to tell everybody that all Chinese people have bicycles. In expanding on the subject of Chinese bicycle ownership he recounts his observations of employees at Bigtruck's North Hauler factory in another part of China. He tells how they all pedal their bicycles out of the factory gates at knock-off time in a very orderly fashion.
<b>Lines 30-46</b>	Hans then invites Pete to expand on his description of the Chinese by asking him about his past dealings with them. He says he found them very friendly, not at all aggressive, that they have awful writing paper and that they are not as industrious as he had imagined.

The first set of turns presented below extends from lines 8 to 28 of the transcript in Appendix Three, equating to sections two and three of the summary. Fritz has just commented that the effect of the government's damming programme will be to change radically the whole geography of the area. Following this comment, Hans retorts (Tape 6A, transcript p. 34):

*Hans:* But people who do not consider human rights couldn't possibly care less about something like that.

*Fritz:* Thousands and thousands of people are living there.

*Pete:* All the villages and towns.



*Fritz:* About 400 metres. (F points to the map)

*Hans:* They want to make their own mistakes.

*Pete:* Yip. 1.2 billion people, every one with a bicycle some have two bicycles. Funny, where we've got Northhaul we've got 500 people all with bicycles and when it comes to knocking off time they all line up outside of the gates then they open the gates and I was expecting to see them rush you know like they would here when they come out of works in the old days. But they don't they just pedal very slowly all in a line, nobody overtakes anybody, very orderly and as soon as and they close the town to traffic no cars are allowed for, I think, it's 20 minutes after knocking-off time as it would kill thousands of them. But they are very orderly you know, I expected to see them all rushing and tearing about you know but they just pedal slowly down the road.

The set of turns above contain several elements worthy of comment. The first element of note is the linguistic and, by extension, the discursive practice of using a comparative construct for articulating cultural difference in which the Self is largely implicit, whereas the Other is explicit and thus becomes the repository of difference. This has been done by drawing a boundary around and thus classifying a construct called 'the Chinese' and then fleshing out this category with recourse to a variety of social and cultural materials which are seen to apply homogeneously to all those Chinese contained within the boundary. This act of classification is a primary tool of discourse, an act of boundary control which serves to reduce the diversity of the Other by making it a discrete and homogeneous object for discussion. The second element to comment upon is the variety of social materials, images and sets of representations attached to this category and the identity created concomitantly for the Chinese through these. In this regard the Chinese are constructed as 'uncivilised' (having no regard for 'human rights'), 'intransigent' ('they want to make their own mistakes'), part of an industrially backward nation (through the possession of bikes rather than cars, and through the allusion to 'coming out of the works in the old days') and a 'passive' people ('very orderly'). Through these materials the Chinese are presented in clearly pejorative ways as a 'backward' people, implicit in the description of China's human rights' record and

the allusions to its status as an industrialised nation. This construction of the Chinese as backward is most clearly articulated a few lines later in this episode. The following set of turns refer to lines 29 to 42 in the transcript in Appendix Three. Hans has just asked Pete what the Chinese are like when he deals with them. Pete replies (Tape 6A, Transcript p. 35):

*Pete:* I was surprised, they were very friendly (...), they are not aggressive at all they are very mild people. (sounds very earnest)

*Dieter:* They write everything down.

*Pete:* Oh yeah yeah.

*Dieter:* And they tend to be writing memos at the same time and the next day they tell you but yesterday at ten minutes past four you said (...).

*Pete:* And they have awful paper, don't they, like tissue paper, very thin and they invented paper didn't they, the Chinese, you know awful paper.

*Hans:* Marco Polo brought a few sheets.

*Pete:* Yeah (...) they weren't as industrious as I imagined they would be, they all have settees in their offices, chairs.

*Hans:* Maybe you should go back to that.

*Pete:* Yeah (...) a step backwards.

*Pete:* And the vegetables were good, but some of the meat I was a bit doubtful about, but the vegetables were very good.

Again this set of turns begins discursively with reference to 'the Chinese' as a homogeneous category of people, with Bigtruck's Chinese business colleagues acting as a kind of 'cultural barometer' for the entire Chinese nation. Pete and Hans then go on to describe the Chinese as friendly, not aggressive, writing down everything, having awful paper, less industrious as at first imagined, eating good vegetables but dubious meat and, in the culmination of all these materials, as presenting 'a step backwards' (Pete). Perhaps worthy of some attention is the discussion of the Chinese invention of paper. First of all there is the insinuation in Pete's turn that the Chinese invention of paper was



a kind of 'historical achievement' the likes of which had never since been repeated, a kind of high point in Chinese history. Hans's reference to Marco Polo and the process of colonisation which he brought with him also instantiates a form of subjugative social material through which the Chinese are constructed as weak and inferior, painting them as an Eastern target of Western expansion. One note of caution here is that although I am suggesting that this episode might be interpreted as an exercise in intercultural subjugation, I am not suggesting that the managers only advance dismissively negative images of the Chinese. After all, Pete does describe them as 'friendly' and declare his liking for Chinese vegetables.

However, interpreting this episode as a subjugative form allows me to demonstrate the workings of discursive power contained within these descriptions of the Chinese. In terms of the Self-Other dichotomy on which these descriptions are based, what these turns serve to do is to privilege the first term, in this case the Self as superior to the secondary term, the Other, which is dialectically rendered inferior. By articulating the workings of discursive power in this way we can begin to render visible the hidden work of the Self in creating the Other. For just as the Chinese are rendered inferior, backward, passive, etc. through the dialectics of identity the Europeans, in this case the Self, are constructing themselves as superior, advanced, industrialised, active, civilised. In short the Self is an image of an industrialised and civilised, but essentially discursive Western European culture. What has happened though is that this contingency and ethnocentricity of the Self has been masked through the articulation of discourse.

So far in this section, I have attempted to demonstrate the forms and ways in which the participants in my research study articulate what they mean by cultural difference. I have argued that this primarily takes the form of comparative cultural constructs based on a Self-Other dichotomy. In the majority of cases it should be noted however that it is

only the Other which is explicitly articulated in managers' accounts. Importantly I noted the ways in which the managers' categories of Otherness, particularly that of the Germans, contained within them contradictory and paradoxical elements which undermined the overall homogeneity of the Self: Other binaries. This homogeneous, stable and organised appearance of Otherness came at the suppression of those elements which simultaneously had the potential to disorganise it. Furthermore, towards the end of this sub-section, I attempted to go beyond this interpretivist work by arguing that the managers' accounts of the Other were in fact part and parcel of discourses relating to the Germans and the Chinese. In other words rather than naturally occurring meanings, the social actors in this study drew upon specific sets of practices, images and representations which work along historical lines of power/knowledge. I move now to consider the contexts in which these articulations of Otherness circulated.

#### **5.4.8 Contexts of cultural difference**

The first point of relevance here is to underline once again the relative paucity of such constructions of national cultural difference. The vast majority of text which I transcribed contained little explicit construction of national cultural difference such as that highlighted in the previous section. Most of my data comprise complex discussion of technical issues, a fact which would seem to mirror and provide evidence of the managers' claims that most of the differences which concerned them were related to business issues. What is interesting though is that the constructions of Otherness which do exist within the data belong to very specific contexts. Firstly, the majority of data on cultural difference emanates from interviews I conducted with Bigtruck employees. Given the nature of these interviews as forms of 'consciously reflective dialogue', it can be suggested that, as before, constructions of the Other take form in situations which have been 'intercultural' and are therefore written in conditions of intercultural



awareness. In a sense therefore it is the medium, that is interview narratives, that plays a central role in shaping the message.

When emerging within the Service Meetings however the constructions of national difference circulated exclusively in *marginal* contexts. In the case of Service Meetings these marginal contexts took two forms. The most prominent form was the space between agenda items where the managers took some time for a break in their discussions. While the discussion of agenda items took precedence in the proceedings, breaks between the items provided pockets for small talk, a common theme of which was cultural difference. Through its position in the talk, cultural difference was rendered marginal. This provides evidence of the purportedly secondary role of national culture in the overall proceedings with constructions of difference patterned and structured by the agenda for business. A further point of note here is that the small talk about cultural differences fulfilled an important social function in the meetings. Specifically they served as repair mechanisms in the talk either when discussions became heated between the participants and they took a break, or alternatively when there had been a silence and they needed something to 'break the ice'. Discussions about difference therefore provided the managers with a mechanism to re-identify themselves with each other.

The second context in which cultural differences emerged were 'backstage' (Goffman, 1959) contexts (contrasted to the frontstage contexts of the meetings themselves), such as those already mentioned in this chapter. These backstage contexts included hotel bars, airport lounges, the 'Pfefferkorn' restaurant in Dortmund, train cars, taxis, toilets, and work canteens. Two points are of note in relation to these contexts. Firstly, as already argued in this chapter, 'sensing' difference visually and aurally frequently provided the conditions in which the Other was subsequently constructed textually.

Social constructions of Otherness at times had profoundly 'material' (sensory) origins. Secondly, these contexts, notably the toilet beside the meeting room in Dortmund, provided a 'safe' place in which the Other could be constructed, safe because of the lack of physical presence of the Other. Indeed it was in this very toilet in Dortmund that Cameron referred to Hans as 'the new Goebbels'. It was in these contexts that I gained some of my most intimate and revealing data. They added depth and frankness to my understandings. It is important to note however that I am not suggesting that these backstage contexts gave me insight into what the Bigtruck managers 'really' thought, as if these contexts were in some way more authentic, or more true. Rather I am simply suggesting that different kinds of constructions emerged within different contexts. In coming to the close of this section, the data seem to suggest that constructions of national cultural difference do not appear randomly in the flow of organisational realities. They seem to be patterned, locally emergent and contextually contingent.

Before moving on to section 5.5, it is time to take stock of the reconstructed data presented thus far in the chapter. I began this chapter by presenting the most fundamental way in which the managers articulated their notion of difference, namely by asserting a division between differences which could be attributed to culture and those which had nothing to do with culture, but were merely business issues. This fundamental opposition was used to construct the semiotic square illustrated in figure 5.2 which provides the organising template for this chapter. I went on to look at the contexts in which this division between culture and business was most commonly articulated and then focused my attention on the culture side of the opposition. I first outlined the forms in which cultural difference seemed to reside, primarily implicit and explicit comparative constructs based on a division of Self and Other and continued secondly by highlighting their contextually patterned and locally contingent nature. I



highlighted the fact that culture was seen to have fluid boundaries and assume multiplicitous forms, and that it contained within it paradoxical and contested elements. A central line of thought so far in this chapter has been that rather than simply naturally occurring meanings and forms, the cultural differences articulated by the social actors in my research might better be regarded as discursive constructs. In other words the classifications, categories and sets of representations drawn upon by the managers in their constructions of the Other are historically and politically contingent. Moving on from this, in section 5.5 I turn my attention to the other part of the opposition, namely the managers' constructions of 'business differences'.

### **5.5 Constructs of Management Rationality**

For all the managers who took part in this research, it was the business itself rather than the cultural context in which it took place, that provided the basis for difference. All five managers constructed their co-operative work as business, not culture. To re-iterate an earlier quote from Cameron (Tape 28A, Transcript p. 92):

I would rather look at the thing as a business association with business problems rather (...) and get the problems on the table and deal with them, rather than accentuate the cultural thing.

In this section it is my intention to explore and critique the ways and contexts in which this part of the semiotic square took form. To this end, I commence this section by arguing that the participants' notions of business-related differences are based on a specific conception of their managerial identity. In outlining what this identity looks like, I then highlight the particular social and organisational materials, primarily a set of specific values and practices, which the participants mobilise in their identity-work and suggest that these take highly codified and structured forms. This section 5.5 relates then to category two of the semiotic square illustrated in figure 5.2.

### 5.5.1 The rational manager

The suggestion that difference is fundamentally a business-related phenomenon begs the question of what such difference might look like and how it emerges. A starting point for an answer is to suggest that ‘business’ does not function by itself, but that it is practised and articulated by and through humans. As such any notion of a business difference is not an autonomously self-constructing phenomenon, but a profoundly human construct. This idea is contained within the following quotation from Pete. Expressed to me over a coffee in Bigtruck’s board room, Pete and I had been embroiled in some extended casual chat about exactly what he thought the business differences were between himself and his German colleagues. He brought the conversation to a close with the following (not tape-recorded):

At the end of the day we are just managers, not Germans or British, just all managers.

This quote tells us that at the heart of all business lies the pursuit and the articulation of a particular identity, in this case not a cultural identity, but a desired managerial identity which might be broadly characterised as instrumental, rational and purposive. Through Pete’s disassociation of the latter with a particular national culture, the quote suggests that this ‘managerial identity’ is a universal construct, one which is not only universally understood but also universally desirable. It is the classification of such a managerial identity which provides the ‘yardstick’ or the ‘normative ground’ for the identification of business differences. As such it can be said that ‘business differences’ are directly related to and articulated through the pursuit and construction of a managerial identity. But what is this ‘managerial identity’?

An analysis of the data suggests that it bases itself on a number of *coded values* which serve as a normative frame of reference for organisational action. The first and most



important of these values is that managerial activity should be 'rational' activity and by implication that managers should be rational. In other words the pursuit of managerial identity is the pursuit of rationality, or the search for reasoned action. This guiding ethos, which lies not only at the 'heart' of modern (ist) management but also at the core of the Modernist 'project', is articulated both implicitly and explicitly by the managers in a variety of ways. The most common expression of this rationality took the form of the managers' metaphorisation of their job as 'problem-solving' and therefore their identity as 'problem-solvers'. Interestingly within the particular context of these two organisations, this metaphor would seem to arise from the very engineering context in which they work. In this regard, the most common usage of this metaphor is related to the imperative of finding a 'technical solution' for trucks which have broken down. A brief, but typical and illuminative example of this comes from Service Meeting Three. We are about thirty minutes into the proceedings and have moved on to item 84 on the agenda entitled 'Noise level in driver's cabin'. The problem here is that on certain trucks, the level of noise emanating from the engine into the driver's cabin has breached safety standards and therefore poses a threat to the health of the driver. This breach of safety standards represented the problem, the solution for which, increased insulation of the driver's cabin, is discussed in this part of the transcript. This excerpt begins with a question from Pete to Hans about the customer who has this problem with the noise level (Tape 21A, Transcript pp. 8-9).

*Pete:* This guy, he's a Bergbau customer, but he has only got this one machine doesn't he (...) and he won't deal with you until he gets this one put right.

*Hans:* That's right. Well he had Volvo machines. He used to have Bergbau (...), we couldn't supply him any more for other reasons, then he had Volvos. Then we got into business with Bigtruck and one machine. And he said don't enter my yard any more unless you offer me a solution. This is gospel truth.

*Pete:* The solution is in two parts. First of all, we are going to get Beilstein to come and fit these parts and see what difference that makes and then in September we will have the kit available.

*Cameron:* I didn't know that they had a brake in that.

*Hans:* Oh yes. With the new driver's cab, with the new cabin, you can't close it any more.

*Cameron:* It's only a very small meeting valve where the steering is done by that big amplifier rather than at the back end. Whereas in the 25 or 30 it's a full flow orbitrum which does make a lot of noise, but on the 40 it's maybe the size.

*Hans:* Well there is, it is operated also in a retrofit which applies to 25, 30 and 40 and at first we didn't believe it ourselves but it was then confirmed it applies there. We concluded and just in order to leave any stone unturned in order to solve this problem.

What is important about the above set of turns is not the content *per se*, but the fact that they are patterned and structured by the 'problem-solving' metaphor. In other words the flow of the conversation as well as the discourses of engineering in which it is couched, are anchored by the need to provide a technical solution to the customer's problem. Although the above is only one brief example of it, this problem-solving metaphor is paramount in patterning the managers' discussions of technical items in all the meetings I transcribed. Given that the majority of data I have comprises complex discussions of technical issues, it is difficult to underestimate therefore the key role which this metaphor plays in the managers' conduct of business and, by extension, in their pursuit of a managerial identity. A further point of note here is that of the centrality of reason and rationality in being a good problem-solving manager. The set of turns above display evidence of the 'performance' of reason, with Hans for example justifying the reason for installing a new brake. Providing a solution, an act based on a specific set of reasoned decisions (usually rational instrumental), represented the guiding ethos in the construction of managerial identity within this particular case.

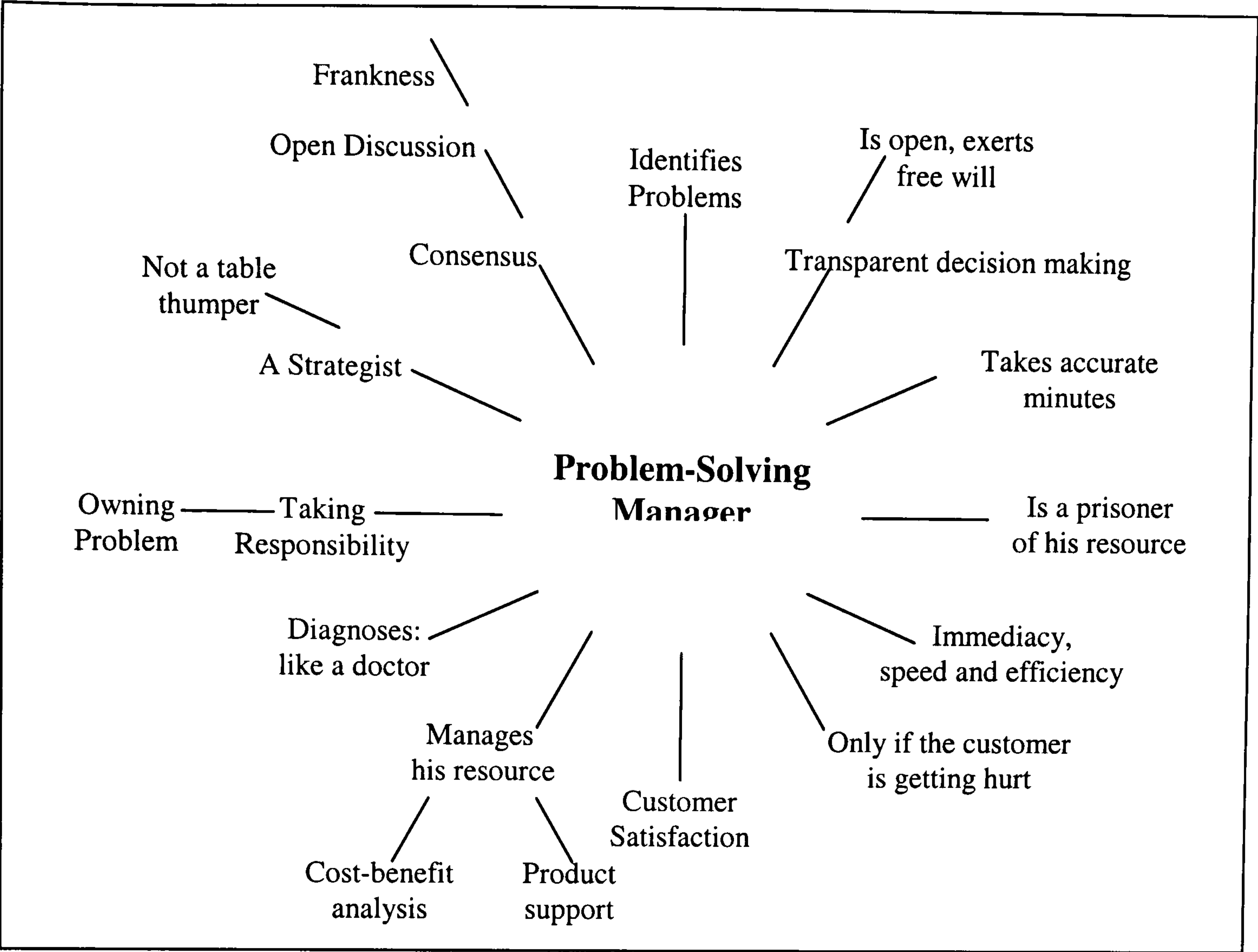
It is important to emphasise however that the notion of problem-solving, although most frequently expressed in engineering contexts, also provided a frame of reference for the conduct of business as a whole. Finding a solution for any kind of business-related



problem became a normative framework for the conduct of all organisational actions. Even finding a restaurant for a corporate dinner became a problem-solving exercise to enhance 'customer satisfaction'. The instrumental rational discourse substantiated within the problem-solving metaphor was the predominant narrative resource for the construction of managerial identity within the context of my empirical research. As such, I would like now to expand on this problem-solving metaphor by outlining the various metonymic links which the managers mobilised in their talk and which therefore served to circulate the importance of this metaphor throughout the organisations. Rather than mention each and every link which might be made to this central metaphor however, I draw your attention to figure 5.5.1 which attempts to encapsulate the most pertinent of these. Just as the problem-solving metaphor represents and instantiates in language the value of rationality in constructions of managerial identity, these metonymic links provide further examples of related values. I now expand on the nature of rationality and then move to two related values, those of transparency and consensus.

To this end, I turn to the beginning of Service Meeting Four and a discussion between Cameron, Hans, Dieter and a new face at these meetings, Rudolf Schimdt, who has been moved into the role of trouble-shooter at Bergbau. The context for this discussion is important. Over the eighteen month period I worked with Bigtruck/Bergbau I witnessed a significant transformation in the ways in which the organisations co-operated. Set against a background of worsening relations, this particular discussion was held in the light of senior management intervention into the co-operation between the organisations' respective service and warranty departments.

**Figure 5.5.1: Values of the Problem-Solving Manager**



Frustrated at the length of time it was taking Bigtruck to provide technical solutions for faulty trucks, sometimes up to two years, Bergbau’s own Managing Director had sent Herr Schmidt directly to the meetings in order to ‘get things sorted’ (off-the-cuff remark from Cameron). This context for the discussion, at which it should be noted Pete was not initially present, provided the conditions for the participants, Cameron in particular, to construct and ‘perform’ themselves as efficient, effective, rational, problem-solving managers. The first quotation below demonstrates this well and follows a long turn by Rudolf who had been outlining his future role in the meetings. Cameron responds (Tape 24A, Transcript pp. 1-2):

There’s no question that (...) we are doing our best to resolve them (business problems) within the framework of the organisation that we have. There’s many, many problems involved in resolving issues as myself and Hans know, so it’s, there’s a lot of minor issues that have got to be resolved, technical issues which are time-consuming on both sides. But certainly from my perspective we resolve long-standing issues in the quickest fashion and if we are not going to



resolve them then we should be frank with each other and say that we aren't going to resolve them because whatever reason. There's no unwillingness on our part (...) we are at times prisoners, prisoners of our own resource, and it's getting the prioritisation, priorities to resolve issues. We can't solve every issue within 24 hours. From our perspective there is no unwillingness. We want to keep every customer happy. There are some issues which have been on far too long, mainly the K95 brakes, which seems to go on forever. I think that's a poor reflection on this company. The problem has been lying with Bigtruck. Unfortunately Hans has been subject to a lot of problems within his own company and it's absolutely not his problem, it's my problem. As far as you're concerned it's a problem that I've got to resolve. I can't say much more than that.

This very long quotation captures all the essential elements in the construction of the rational manager better than any other in my data. On the one hand Cameron is explicitly constructing his job as one of 'solving problems', making several references to this in the above quote. As well as this, however, Cameron is also specifying some of the conditions which should ensure the successful, timely and therefore rational resolution of these problems including frank and open communications, effective priority setting and a customer-focus. Furthermore he stipulates that he is restricted by or 'a prisoner of' the resources he has available to him, thus demonstrating an awareness of the need to make reasoned decisions which will match resources with solutions. Perhaps most interesting however is Cameron's declaration of responsibility for the delay in the solution on the K95 truck and his 'absolution' of responsibility on behalf of Hans. This is the one and only time where Cameron made such an explicit statement as this. The reason why this is interesting is that it later creates the conditions for him to declare, with regard to this particular issue (Tape 24A, Transcript p. 10):

I am the only guy that's flying the flag at the moment.

Cameron seems to be making an assault for the pinnacle of rationality here, declaring an almost 'patriotic' stake in the terrain of 'efficient and effective management'. He is performing a Self whose paramount interest is the successful resolution of problems in the utmost conditions of management rationality.

As exhibited a little later in this discussion one of these conditions, and thus an associated value of management rationality, is that of *transparency*. The desirability of being accountable for one's actions and being able to do this through the use of reason and rational choice is demonstrated in the following turns. Dieter had just asked Cameron whether there is anything further he could do, any more information he could provide, which would help Cameron to accelerate the process of finding technical solutions. Cameron replies (Tape 24A, Transcript p. 3):

*Cameron:* I've got nothing to hide. I don't hide anything.

*Dieter:* Because the question is would this be a back-up for you, by your management, when it comes to the design or would it be (...).

*Cameron:* I think that the back-up is eh ok for me (points to the long term document). I am perfectly open, I don't hide anything, any of the business we do. It's open for audit with any of these people and if they're going to try to audit what we are doing and if they are going to speed up the process then I am delighted.

*Hans:* Are you sharing this minutes with your manager?

*Dieter:* This basically means that except for the fact that they may not be able to read everything all the time regarding the payments, we can assume that the management basically knows about at least the major problems we have.

*Cameron:* Yeah.

The set of turns above comes to centre around a document called 'long-term problems with Bigtruck', an A4 sheet of bar-graphs which illustrates the length of time various issues on the agenda have remained unsolved. The preparation of these bar-graphs (by Dieter) is in itself an act of transparency, an attempt to render visible some of the most outstanding problems in the business relationship. It can be suggested from Cameron's opening turn above that he regarded this document as an insinuation on Dieter's part that he is trying to 'hide' the severe difficulties currently being encountered, an interpretation reinforced in a post-meeting chat. Cameron wished to deal with this insinuation in no uncertain terms and he does this by articulating that he has nothing to



hide and subsequently performing the desirability of transparency in their co-operation. He even claims to be 'delighted' about the prospect of having his 'transparency' audited. The turns tell us that this transparency takes two forms. Firstly it means that an open line of communication exists between him and senior management such that the latter is fully cognisant of the activities of the former. Secondly it means that in communicative terms, he is being and thus posits the desirability of being open, frank, honest and upfront about the issues he co-operates on. Cameron is thus rendering himself accountable to equivalent and senior managers. Before moving to a related issue I should stress however the performative elements of Cameron's turns. Not only was he articulating through language the value of transparency, he was also doing it through his behaviour. In this particular episode I observed how Cameron made extensive use of 'open' gestures, such as sitting back in his chair, stretching his arms out in front of him and articulating with open palms to Rudolf. His eye contact was also very direct and concerted, and his tone of voice firm and determined. His underlining of the importance of transparency was therefore as much a corporeal performance as it was a linguistic one.

A further value which underpins the construction of a managerial identity and which is directly linked to transparency relates to the need to set clear priorities. It is not so much the imperative of priorities which is of relevance here however. Rather it is the need to agree these priorities collectively and through *consensus* which is important. Remaining with the beginning of Service Meeting Four for some pertinent data, the issue of priorities, through which the desirability of consensus is explicitly articulated, is introduced into the meeting by Rudolf. His interjection occurs about a quarter of the way through the discussion and follows Dieter's presentation to Cameron of the bar

graphs contained within the 'long term problems with Bigtruck' document. Rudolf asks (Tape 24A, Transcript p. 4):

*Rudolf:* Would it be helpful to give priorities on these issues?

*Cameron:* I try and prioritise. Normally what happens is that under normal circumstances whether it be a Bergbau or a Bigtruck truck, we are seeing a problem happen and a problem will be tackled on a prioritised basis or safety reasons, it will be tackled immediately. It's costing a lot of money, not a lot of money but a lot of downtime or availability problems in the system or if it is causing a lot of customer dissatisfaction it should be tackled immediately. Added to that it is a large cost item, it should be tackled very quickly and then from that down everything else, these are priorities one, two, three and ten. So we tackle things that are hurting us on a prioritised basis. First safety first immediately then things that are hurting the customer very badly and causing a lot of downtime, high downtime cost secondly and then the third which are things that are problems that are not seriously affecting availability or cost.

Cameron performs his managerial identity above with the immediate assertion that he already prioritises his business, thereby providing a swift reply to the implicit suggestion in Rudolf's question that he may not. He then goes on to construct this identity by outlining the criteria which he uses to accord priorities to agenda items. What is interesting about Cameron's outline however is that he can be seen to be constructing his criteria as he goes along. Thus he begins by introducing potentially relevant organisational materials at the start of the turn and ends by reconstructing them into what he implicitly considers a more 'rational' organisational architecture in the latter stages. Given that this set of criteria is not written down in any Bigtruck manual or quality handbook and has therefore never been officially conventionalised and documented, Cameron's turn constitutes an attempt on his part to perform reason and rationality. He is demonstrating that he has a rational basis for the priorities he makes. Having established his own credentials as a rational manager, he goes on later in the discussion to turn the tables on Bergbau and explicitly request them to begin to prioritise what they do. As such he is forcing them to consider how they might perform their



rationality. It is at this point when Cameron clarifies the importance of consensus in management rationality. He says (Tape 24A, Transcript p. 6):

*Cameron:* (...) I agree that we have got to try and meet our customer's requirements, but what we shouldn't do is to switch from the big picture because something like the brakes should have all the attention until it's dead, killed, finished, you know and what happens generally is that he who bangs the table loudest that gets something done. So when we get a situation like that, it comes in through sales because I'm product support now and he's my boss the sales director, then I've to switch.

*Dieter:* That does not mean as I understand it that our sales people, maybe Mr Peters, is the one who has to say well, ok, if this is not fixed then we are not going to sell any more of this trucks or something like that.

*Cameron:* There's got to be consensus that's why I'm saying it's clearly a priority basis.

Again an understanding of the context to this set of turns is important in interpreting it. When talking about 'a situation like that' Cameron is referring to a historical set of circumstances in the Bigtruck/Bergbau relationship where the work of Cameron, Pete, Dieter and Hans was being interfered with by their respective sales managers. Specifically whenever Fritz Peters, Bergbau's sales director, was upset because a truck was taking too long to get fixed, he called John Rotherford, Bigtruck's sales and marketing director, and insisted that he put pressure on Cameron and Pete to solve the problem in the short term. As a result of this Pete and Cameron were frequently having to set aside the prioritised work they were undertaking at that moment in order to deal with Fritz Peters' issues or, to paraphrase Cameron, to appease his 'loud banging on the table'. By mobilising this narrative resource, Cameron is able to suggest that it is Bergbau rather than Bigtruck which has the problem with prioritisation. As such Cameron asserts that Bergbau need to reach a consensus internally, that is primarily with the sales department, on what they consider to be the main priorities for action before they come to the negotiating table. As he goes on to articulate (Tape 24A, Transcript p. 7):

*Cameron:* (...) it's a sign of responsibility for getting everything done, so what I'm saying to you is that you should have a consensus between yourself what you want done on a prioritised basis. There's always going to be a situation between meetings when you come to me and say this has happened, we need to do something, that's always going to happen and we should bargain for that (...) and we should say this is killing us, we need to do something immediately whether it's safety related or cost related. But in principle we should be focused on that which is hurting us more from a Bergbau perspective and have it prioritised.

Two elements of the above quotation seem relevant. The first is the way in which Cameron places himself in a 'superior' position by telling Bergbau that they have to reach a consensus on what they want prioritised and by positing this as a 'sign of responsibility'. By inference Bergbau is being constructed as irresponsible since it fails to meet this criteria, and Cameron and Bigtruck as responsible since he already prioritises what he does. The second element of note is his underlining of the need for consensus, a point which he makes a further three times in the discussion, and importantly in bringing it to a close. Apart from explicit use of the term 'consensus' Cameron makes reference to other metonyms which might lead to consensus such as 'frankness', 'honesty' and 'open-mindedness'. For example when responding to Dieter's complaint about time delays he says (Tape 24A, Transcript p. 9):

I can understand the frustration, but we've got to be frank with each other (...). I don't want to increase your aspirations and do everything, that's why we should have a priority list and be honest with one another and say this is really hurting us.

For Cameron then the ability to achieve consensus through frank and honest discussion is clearly a determining factor in setting realistic and achievable objectives. As such it can be said that the value of consensus, with striking Habermasian overtones, is paramount in creating a set of communicative conditions which will foster rational decision-making and thus efficient and effective management.



Before bringing this sub-section to a close with a summary, I would like to undermine the preceding presentation of some of the key values of the problem-solving manager as a seamless and unproblematic basis for a universally accepted managerial code. Just as I attempted to problematise the apparent homogeneity of the binary oppositions of Self and Other which created categories such as 'the Germans' in the last section, a closer examination of the syntagmatic aspects of figure 5.5.1 reveals it to contain paradoxical and contested elements. There are several examples that might be used to illustrate this. Take for instance the importance which Cameron places on the value of customer satisfaction. This particular value at times stands in a contradictory and paradoxical relationship with his assertion of the value of prioritising business items. For Cameron, customer satisfaction is only a top priority if it involves a safety issue, that is something which is potentially threatening to the physical well-being of the customer. Moreover, if the issue is not safety related, then customer satisfaction will only become a priority if there is a sufficient critical mass of trucks suffering from the same problem. In this light the blanket assertion of the desirability of customer satisfaction is a fictitious one, in the sense that it is only ever asserted in specific contexts and for specific reasons. As a value its substantiation in managerial action very much depends on its correlation with other values, notably that of 'managing' one's resources. As such, there is an antagonism here within the code of the 'problem-solving manager' between the values of customer satisfaction and prioritisation. This can be further illustrated with recourse to Cameron's characterisation of Fritz. It is clear from the material presented in this sub-section that the prototypical and ideal 'problem-solving manager' is one who is customer focused, strategically oriented (i.e. he knows how to prioritise) and a rational decision maker (i.e. works through consensus to make decisions). The positing of such a homogeneous ideal, particularly by Cameron, is however undermined when one

considers the way in which he talks about Fritz, Bergbau's Sales Director. As the Head of Bergbau's sales organisation, Fritz's top priority is clearly that of customer satisfaction (this is a facet of Fritz's professional identity which makes him as much respected as ridiculed). Despite this, Cameron does not knit together this customer focus with the values of prioritisation and consensus when he characterises Fritz as someone who is an irrational table thumper (and thus anti-consensual) and who has no concept of the 'big picture' (and thus has no sense of prioritisation). In other words, it would seem possible to be customer focused yet also a non-strategic thinker and an irrational decision-maker, a characterisation which immediately undermines and contests the homogeneity and stability of the metaphor of the rational problem-solving manager. What these two brief examples demonstrate then is that the organisation and construction of the metaphorical problem-solving manager contains within it elements which can stand in contradictory and antagonistic relations to one another. And as mentioned earlier, the particular configuration of codified values mobilised in the construction of managerial identity and difference is very much dependent on the metonymic linkages made by the social actors themselves. This would seem to reinforce my earlier suggestion that a useful way to conceive of the way in which identities and differences are simultaneously organising and disorganising phenomena is to consider the ever-shifting nature of metonymic ordering.

So far in this section then I have argued that the notion of business difference emerges in the participants' construction of a managerial identity based on a specific set of coded values. I have demonstrated how the managers mobilised a variety of discursive resources, particularly metaphors and their metonymic linkages, in order to promote value rationality. In this regard, I have shown first of all that the key value of this managerial identity is its 'rationality', which primarily found expression in the



managers' metaphorisation of their work as 'problem-solving'. Using this as a base metaphor I then went on to explore some metonymic links from the data, regarding these as associated values of this problem-solving identity which undermine and antagonise its purported stability and fixity. Specifically I looked at transparency and consensus. What these values seem indicative of is the existence of a particular semiotic code which provides a common framework of meaning for the Bigtruck and Bergbau managers. This code serves as a normative frame of reference for the conduct of business and as such is there to guide the managers' language and behaviours. The pursuit of this coded managerial identity therefore functions to bind the participants together in a commonly desired act of identification. What this tells us therefore is that 'difference' lies in the divergences between the managers in the extent to which they display and enact these values. For example Cameron insinuates that he is more consensually orientated than his German colleagues in the data presented above. However it is not just a set of coded values which has the simultaneous capacity both to bind and differentiate the managers. The values themselves find instantiation in a number of codified *knowledges* and *practices* which also have the capacity either to create social bonds or foster deep divisions between the managers. I now go on to consider the most important of these from the data.

### **5.5.2 Engineering codes and rational instrumental discourse**

Engineering codes (that is shared scientific principles, conventions and practices which enable the design and maintenance of engines, machines, trucks etc.) provided the resource for the vast majority of the manager's talk and therefore also the resource for a considerable amount of difference. During the initial stages of the research this realisation seemed somewhat disappointing to me. I recall being miffed at the beginning of the study because, at first sight, there appeared to be little data which I

thought counted as 'cultural difference'. I distinctly remember being bored by discussions about engineering and technical issues which meant absolutely nothing to me and bore seemingly little relevance to my thesis. However, it was precisely because these codes were not meaningful to me, but were crucially so for the participants, that these very data are so instructive. For what this observation shows is that engineering codes were fundamental to the managers' processes of meaning-making during these meetings and that they should by extension be central to my study. What made them appear uninteresting was that they seemed to constitute some kind of 'objective', homogeneous and 'culture-less' body of knowledge which could be simply drawn upon for the discussion and resolution of technical problems. However a close reading of the instances where these codes are mobilised shows that although they at first sight provide semiotic resource for the construction of technical solutions, they were also the resource for the managers' identifications and performances of themselves as engineers. Given the large number of lengthy discussions which could be drawn upon to exemplify this point, I have limited myself to just one.

The excerpts of talk comprising this discussion are examined below. They emanate from Service Meeting Three and relate to item 126 on the agenda which concerned technical problems with steering pumps. Table 5.5.2 summarises the four main sections of this episode of talk. They were recorded in Tape 22A and are contained between pages 41 and 48 of the main transcript. The full transcript of this episode is provided in Appendix Four.



**Table 5.5.2: Engineering codes and steering pumps**

**Lines 1-15:** Pete introduces item 126 on the agenda. He informs Hans and Dieter that he had been discussing the commercial nature of this item earlier on in the morning with Vera. Hans remarks that he is only interested in the technical side of this item. Lines 5-15 document an extended turn from Hans in which he outlines the seriousness of this problem and asks about the provision of a suitable solution.

**Lines 16-37:** Cameron informs Hans that they are waiting for their engineering department to approve a particular solution and that this will take some time. Cameron does not however divulge any specific information about the solution being considered by engineering. As a result of this, Hans consistently tries to draw Pete and Cameron to give him more engineering details, asking them what they think the solution might look like.

**Lines 38-50:** Following Hans's insistent requests, Cameron gives an extended outline of his suggested solution drawing on engineering codes. Hans replies by supporting Cameron's technical suggestions.

**Lines 51-77:** Cameron then begins to embellish his technical account, but Hans intervenes here in order to correct Cameron, a move which Cameron immediately opposes with counterfactual information. Following a short interjection from Hans, Cameron goes on to give an engineering account of the problem with the pumping system as it stands. In a subsequent turn he emphasises the role of a good design solution.

**Lines 78-97:** Hans says that he is not happy and Cameron tells him to speak his mind. He says that he does not feel he has learned anything from the discussions to reassure him about the state of this issue. Dieter suggests an alternative solution to the one proposed by Cameron, but this is categorically rejected first by Pete and then by Cameron.

The section of this episode presented below relates to part three of the summary and demonstrates the way in which the managers, in this case Cameron and Hans, draw upon engineering codes in identifying themselves as managers. Hans has just asked Cameron in line 37 what he feels the solution is most likely to look like. Cameron replies (Tape 27A, Transcript p. 44):

*Cameron:* From my standpoint, what (...) from my standpoint that last statement we put in the minute was my perception of the problem and it probably is as it stands to a great respect. Some issues on the K100s, if you look at them in isolation, there is at least two of them. Vicars have one pump and said there is a problem with the guts of the pump and the other one that Vera goes on about that she showed this morning, that was rejected for contamination. There was probably a case in there that there is a problem with the pump. From a quality standpoint I would separate the K100 issues because I believe that that's the problem with the brake pump.

*Hans:* This we would fully support because eh you know if it involves quite some effort in advising you the way we do (...) then we would like to have some reward back and by pointing out to you, if you hadn't had this conclusion, that if everything points in the direction that pump failures are negligible on every other

model apart from K95 and K110. So this should be a very clear indication as to where to start.

*Pete:* The difference between them. It's quite a simple system.

Two points can be made about the turns above. The first is that the participants make clear use of engineering codes, contained for example within phrases such as 'guts of the pump' and 'rejected for contamination', and thus identify themselves as engineers given the meaningful use to which they put this resource. It is precisely because I am not a user of this code and do not understand it that my data seemed at first to hold little interest. One might extend this point to note the biological discourse (talk of 'guts' and 'contamination') used to frame the discussion of the engineering fix in the above turns. This is also evident in many of the other quotations and episodes outlined later in this sub-section where the managers construct themselves almost like 'doctors' offering a 'diagnosis' of the 'infection' or 'disease-ridden' trucks. The intersection of biological and medical discourses with those of engineering is important in the constitution of the rational problem-solving manager. Moving on from this, the second point to note about the above episode is that it is not just the provision of a solution which is causing aggravation between the participants. Deciding on the exact nature of the problem which they are tackling is also causing difficulty and can be seen above in the ways in which they negotiate socially the models of trucks on which the pumps are failing. What this demonstrates is that technical problems are not obvious, unitary issues which somehow exist on their own account. Rather, technical problems are defined socially with particular recourse to engineering codes for their signification. Indeed, Hans's response that 'this we would fully support' illustrates the essentially social nature of technical problems, dependent as they would seem to be on shared understanding and agreement. This shared understanding and agreement would suggest that the collective signification of engineering problems, as well as solutions, is a form of identification for



the participants, through which they can construct themselves and others as 'good engineers' engaging in good 'engineering practice'.

However just as these codes can provide the basis for identification, they can likewise present an opportunity for differentiation. This differentiation usually takes the form of disagreement on technical issues, where one manager asserts that he is right and the other wrong, thus implicitly purporting their superior knowledge of engineering codes. This allows managers to construct themselves as better or worse engineers than their counterparts, relatively speaking. This differential capacity of engineering codes is suitably illustrated in the sets of turns (lines 51-73 the Appendix Four) which relates to section four of the summary contained in table. It immediately follows Pete's retort presented above (Tape 22A, Transcript pp. 44-45):

*Cameron:* In general terms, you have got two years or 5000 hours and then things start to go haywire.

*Hans (interrupts):* Cameron, again I would like to point out that we have, you may have (...) it was not as high as 5, 6, 7000 hours, it was starting at 180 hours.

*Cameron:* No, the issue with the 100s I think is slightly clouding it because we have had at least two reports from Vicars that they have accepted that there is quality issue on the compensator. The compensator jamming which I believe is probably the problem with the K100s, because it is a different pump form the K95. It is a different steering pump, a different part number and a different configuration.

*Pete:* Nevertheless we have got to solve the problem.

*Cameron:* Nevertheless there is something going wrong with the system, it goes out of kilter and then it flares the system up, temperature wise and then if the temperature goes up, the pump is working at above its rated temperature. The lubrication and the slippers in the face go and the pump gives right and then starts contaminating the system, all through the system. And if you are not really diligent and pulling the system apart and cleaning the whole thing out, then you just revisit it very quickly again and a lot of the issue which we have seen (...), and I am not trying to justify Bigtruck's position here, but a lot of the failures that we see are because people are less diligent at doing it. The system has flared up, again clean a little bit, stick in a new pump and then maybe in 200 hours they revisit the problem. But the issue really from an engineering standpoint is what are the conditions which have led to the initial flare-up? And how do we negate that? And that is what I am trying to focus on.

*Hans:* Well you see Cameron, the (mumbled) that are referring to is also very high, most and this is sometimes preventing people to. (C interrupts)

*Cameron:* Well we can argue about this forever and a day (...).

Interpreting these turns, what is immediately noticeable is the contested nature of engineering problems which emerge through interaction. For example, we see how Hans first contests Cameron's assertion that problems with steering pumps tend to set in after two years or 500 hours of use and in turn, secondly, how Cameron then refutes Hans's point by claiming that it is 'slightly clouding the issue'. To re-iterate, this suggests that technical problems are not given, but contested and socially negotiated using engineering codes. Further evidence of this is Cameron's reaction to Pete's turn. Pete would seem to be trying here to avoid a diversion into a complex technical discussion on the nature of the problem by emphasising the need to find a solution. Rather than change the course of the conversation as Pete is indicating should happen, Cameron retrenches himself into an even more extended construction of the technical problem. In doing this Cameron is constructing himself, albeit implicitly, as both a good engineer, through his use of engineering code in delineating the problem, and a good manager, by reducing the complex situation to three key questions which he says he is 'trying to focus on'. He is thereby presenting himself as the rational manager talked about earlier in the chapter who, aware of the difficulties of the problem, is engaging in reasoned action (focusing on the key questions/problems involved) to solve them. Having presented himself in this way, he does not wish to engage in any further discussion of the issue as evidenced by his response to Hans 'we can argue about this forever and a day'. He is simply re-affirming himself as a good engineer and a good manager through this turn, and implicitly saying 'and that's the end of it'. Despite this, Hans is not convinced about the appropriateness of Cameron's way forward. After a small break in the discussion, in which the air between the participants could only have



been described as tense, Pete notices Hans looking perturbed and says to him (Tape 22A, Transcript p. 45, Lines 78-83):

*Pete:* OK? No?

*Hans:* I'm not happy.

*Cameron:* Well, speak your mind then.

*Hans:* I am still.

*Dieter:* It is still completely open when we (...), we don't know when we can expect.

*Hans:* I was hoping actually to learn something that would comfort us or be able to pass something on to (mumbled).

The contestability of technical issues and thus their capacity to differentiate the managers is clearly demonstrated above. Hans's comment 'I am still' indicates that whereas in Cameron's mind the issue had already been brought to a close (remember he says 'well we can argue forever'), Hans is not yet satisfied with the result. Even after extended discussion on this issue, there exists no shared agreement on what constitutes best engineering practice, thus suggesting that even although there is a material and 'unitary' source for the problem (a truck has broken down), its translation into the textual codes of engineering codes is contested.

This episode from Service Meeting Three is a not untypical example of the structure and content of the majority of talk which I transcribed. Most of the agenda items discussed involved this sort of differentiation between the managers. It should be stressed once more however that this differentiation is much more than just a matter of disagreeing over the best solution to a problem. Such acts of differentiation are a central vehicle for the identity work of the individual managers. On the one hand, shared agreement through engineering codes creates an identity which might be summed up by the sentiment 'aren't we all good engineers' (the sentiment 'aren't we all bad engineers'

was never articulated). And on the other it can differentiate identities as in the sentiment ‘I am a good engineer and you are not’ (the sentiment ‘I am a bad manager, and you are not’ was rarely articulated).

In this regard, the discussion documented above presents some fairly typical identity-work on the part of the four managers. We see, for example, how Hans consistently elongates discussions and renders them increasingly complex and more technical through his constant questioning and his unwillingness to let an issue go until he is satisfied. It is on account of such semiotic work that both Cameron and Pete construct his identity as a ‘pedantic, nit-picker’. Similarly, we see how Cameron relates to such elongated discussions by putting forward his perspectives in ways which suggest them to be truths and thus constructing himself as a ‘good engineer’ with all the solutions. This very often entailed him using short, snappy declarative statements aimed at bringing Hans’s extended turns to an end. Cameron was consistently concerned to present himself as both a good manager and a good engineer. Furthermore, Pete’s attempts to divert the flow of the conversation above are typical of his wider role in the meetings of initiating and bringing all agenda issues to a close. Pete was seen to be more conciliatory than Cameron, using his senior position as product assurance manager to dictate the proceedings. As for Dieter, he rarely engaged in the discussions to any great degree. When he did, it was to ask very direct and pertinent questions which got him the reputation as being ‘the shrewd German’, who can cut to the quick of an issue without unnecessary verbiage.

In this sub-section 5.5.2 I have attempted to underline the centrality of engineering codes to the organisational context in which I did my research. What these exemplify is the importance of codified knowledge to the ‘rational identity work’ of the managers and the ways in which it has the capacity simultaneously to create social bonds or foster



deep divisions between the managers. This rational identity-work is not just contained in such formalised knowledges however. It also finds expression in specific codified communicative *practices*.

### 5.5.3 Communicative practices

In addition to codified knowledges, there are many examples of shared rules, conventions and practices which govern the ways in which the managers conduct business communicatively. These conventionalised practices ranged from the formal e.g. the use of ISO standards, to the informal, e.g. agreed turn-taking at writing the minutes, and like the engineering codes above, these are a resource for the identification and differentiation of the managers. The most prominent set of communicative practices in the data centre around the making of the minutes of the meeting. These minutes were crucial documents not only because they were supposed to provide a 'true and accurate record of events' in meetings (Cameron), but also because they provided the agenda for subsequent meetings. It is not so much the degree to which such minutes could ever hope to paint a neutral picture of proceedings which is of interest here. Rather, what is interesting is the set of conventions which govern their creation.

First of all, my initial observations on the meetings noted the conventionalised terminology which surrounded the minutes. For example the managers talked about 'opening' and 'closing' minutes, 'raising agenda items', 'transferring' items 'under new business'. The minutes followed a rigid and set structure with individual technical items followed by a section on MIRs (modification instruction requests) and then new business. Given the structure of the minutes, a regular feature of the meetings involved deciding which issues 'belonged' to which section. This issue of 'belonging' was important since a change in the section of an item led to a change in that item's status. In the short example below, for instance, we see the importance of this issue of where

things ‘belong’. It comes from Service Meeting Two, relates to item 90 on a seat failure and is a typical example of this kind of discussion (Tape 13B, Transcript p. 18):

*Hans:* So you are discussing this internally.

*Pete:* I’ll deal with engineering on that and we’ll report back separately. But I think you are doing the minutes Hans, we don’t want that under this do we?

*Hans:* Pardon.

*Pete:* We don’t want that under this item, you know, it will just confuse it. If we can’t solve it quickly.

*Hans:* No, no, ok so we would have to raise it probably under new business.

*Pete:* Under another item because this will just drift on if we are not (...).

In this particular case, the section to which the item is moved in order to ‘belong’ is crucial to its identity. For if it stays where it currently is in the agenda it will, as Pete says, ‘just drift on’, and become a problem issue for them. In the above case, the decision to move this agenda item is made amicably. However this was not always the case in the data. In fact what ‘belonged’ where in the minutes was one of the key problems which the managers argued about. It frequently became a political issue for the participants, as the following quotations will illustrate, and involved some important identity-work. The data presented below emanates from a post-meeting interview I conducted with Cameron after Service Meeting Two. In his first turn of the interview, he says (Tape 19A, Transcript p. 2):

I think one of the biggest problems we’ve got in it is that there are certain issues on it which they have on a one-off basis, like on one machine which takes as much engineering time as having 50 odd machines and eh because we’re trying to prioritise very carefully what we take on and do, I’m having a problem with this sort of stuff. So what happens is that if they have got a problem and they feel they can’t do anything with it, then there’s an effort to shove it onto these minutes whereby we would have responsibility for closing it out. And whilst we would like to involve ourselves and do as much for them as possible there is a limitation to our resource (...). So whilst this is not on my agenda it is on their agenda and because of that, and because it’s been accepted, it has gone on the minutes and this is where we have got to be extremely careful. I keep telling Pete that we’ve got to be happy with everything that goes in the minutes in terms of is it do-able or is it not do-able. There’s no point doing stuff, and I’ll repeat



myself again putting stuff in the minutes which are going to lie dormant because we haven't got a prioritised resource on it, you see. This is chicken shit you know.

The problem which Cameron is talking about above relates to the issues which the German managers are trying to put into the minutes. Rather than following the organisational convention that only prioritised items can be put onto the agenda, Cameron is asserting here that the Germans simply try to put everything possible onto the agenda regardless of its priority and resource implications. The problem he has with this is that once an item has been put on the agenda, Bigtruck are required to deal with it and this results in them often having to deal with one-off problems on a limited number of trucks ('chicken-shit') rather than major technical difficulties on a significant number. As such this skews the priorities which Cameron sets himself. However there is more at stake in the quote above than just flouting convention. The quote is also an instance of Cameron's construction of self as the rational manager. Throughout the quote he consistently posits norms and conventions of rationality e.g. 'trying to prioritise very carefully', having 'responsibility to close it down', which guide his actions and through which he can position himself as a good and effective manager. In turn this serves to construct the German managers as inferior as Cameron insinuates that they fail to meet his exacting standards of rationality. Indeed this can be illustrated further by a quote from later in the interview. He says (Tape 19A, Transcript p. 4):

I reserve the right to manage a business. And we've got to reach compromises on these matters, but I say again it's all about discussing with them at the pre-minuting stage what we're going to accept if we're going to do something, what we're going to say, what we're going to do.

And similarly in regard to what gets recorded in the minutes (Tape 19A, Transcript p. 5):

(...) a minute should be a record of what is said and what actions are taken at a particular point in time. What you get in that is eh maybe four weeks before he sends the minutes through, some afterthoughts come in so he just writes into it which I object to. You can see the diatribes are in here, I'm rather short and

sharp with what I write into minutes you know and you get into all these diatribes look, that's a long bit of text, you'll see (...).

What this demonstrates is that communicative practices associated with the minutes provide a mechanism through which the managers can either identify or differentiate themselves. In the above case it is Cameron who is seen to be constructing an identity for himself as a rational manager, one who meets the exacting standards of rationality by following efficiently and effectively its conventionalised practices as manifest in the rules on minute-taking.

**5.5.4 Institutional Paraphernalia**

So far in section 5.5 I have attempted to demonstrate how the managers in my study constructed identity and difference through the mobilisation of divisions based on a set of codified values, knowledges and communicative practices. It is important to note however that the *institutional settings* in which these codes were instantiated also comprised important resources of rationality. In this sub-section I would like to mention a few of these as summarised in table 5.5.4.

**Table 5.5.4: Institutional Paraphernalia**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dedicated meetings rooms/<i>Besprechungszimmer</i></li><li>• Reception areas with plastic plants, leather seats and a large selection of daily broadsheets in a variety of languages</li><li>• Photographs of trucks on the wall</li><li>• Clocks showing times in three countries</li><li>• Maps</li><li>• Quality certificates hanging on the wall</li><li>• Regular coffee served by young women/ <i>die Bedienung</i></li><li>• Large and stylish office furniture</li><li>• Bottles of mineral water and a glass</li><li>• A selection of company PR material contained in public places</li><li>• Rigid divisions of space between management offices, manufacturing facilities, distribution and storage areas</li><li>• Meeting room phones with teleconference facilities</li><li>• VCRs, TVs, overhead projectors and flipcharts</li><li>• The smell of lush new carpets</li></ul>
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It is important to note that these forms of institutional artefact do not suggest their own managerialism, but are both created by and in turn create the managerial identities of the participants. Take for instance the dedicated meeting rooms, or as the Germans called them *die Besprechungszimmer*. In Bergbau's Dortmund premises for example, these *Besprechungszimmer* were specially furnished rooms which were found at the very back of the main management building. Having gone through the main gates, parked in the main car park and walked 200 metres to the main entrance, visitors were requested to wait in the main reception area (adorned 'coincidentally' by photographs of Bergbau products) and then led through the various management offices in ascending order of seniority until they reached the meeting rooms at the back. On entering the *Besprechungszimmer* the visitor cannot help but notice that it contained a number of artefacts for the practice of good management ranging from large whiteboards and overhead projectors to VCRs and comfortable leather chairs. What is important about this description is that it shows how the organisational space at Bergbau was divided up not just materially into different departments, offices and meeting rooms connected by particular routes, but more importantly how it was divided *symbolically*. Meeting rooms were specially bounded spaces for the conduct of business, and the preserve of a particular set of people within the organisation. Only senior managers were allowed to use it. Other staff had to meet at tables within their open-plan offices. It was specially furnished and serviced by canteen staff (all middle-aged women) who would knock politely at the door before entering, and leave almost as apologetically as they had come in.

This room was an exclusive symbolic space. On the one hand it gave the senior managers who used it a sense of difference from those who did not. It marked them as different, as part of the higher echelons of the organisation. On the other hand the

realisation that this room gave them such an identity encouraged them in turn to perpetuate further the symbolic exclusivity of the room. In this way the room and its artefacts helped the managers create a particular sense of identity, and in turn the managers continued to signify this marked space in symbolically significant ways. Although this is just one brief example, I hope that it illustrates that the codes of management rationality not only comprised important linguistic and social practices, but also took material form around particular institutional paraphernalia and symbolically constructed spaces. Rationality was contained in the symbolic narratives told around physical artefacts.

The aim of section 5.5 was to explore what the managers in my study meant when they talked about 'business difference', the opposition to cultural difference at the heart of my semiotic square. I have demonstrated that business difference was constructed around the metaphor of the problem-solving manager and that this metaphor found substantiation in a number of codified values (rationality, transparency, consensus), knowledges (engineering codes), communicative practices (minute-taking) and in a more material form, in the physical spaces and artefacts of both organisations. As such it can be said that 'business differences' involved divergences in the extent to which the managers enacted these values, displayed these knowledges, engaged in these practices or perceived these spaces. Importantly, the privileging of this purportedly cohesive, unitary and somehow obvious notion of the rational problem-solving managers contains within it paradoxical and contradictory elements which threaten its stability and undermine its fixity. The creation of difference between the managers in terms of their capacity to enact these values, display these knowledges and engage in these practices inevitably involves then the suppression of contradictory elements which allow them to hold in place their political constructions of good and bad management.



As with section 5.4 we can move on from these interpretations and extend them through the lens of discourse analysis. In articulating what they meant by 'business difference' in interviews and enacting it in meetings, the common theme for all the managers was that 'business' was a set of universal practices and knowledges which all managers should draw upon regardless of their cultural identity. They presented and enacted this managerial knowledge as if it were a construct of and for all managers, a neutral, taken-for-granted and inherently desirable resource for identity-work. In section 5.6 however I argue that this neutrality is not produced of its own accord, but is the discursive result of the very codes which I examined above. In other words I am suggesting that these codes of management rationality actually serve to *normalise* the understanding that it is a neutral, homogeneous and impartial resource for the managerial labour of division. This universal discourse of business has concomitantly been objectified and reified into an impartial site of identification and differentiation through its dislocation by the managers from the very human, and principally linguistic relations which construct them. In the next section I wish to bring a more critical understanding to bear on the managers' construction of business knowledge by arguing that, rather than being 'neutral', it constitutes a site for a fundamental politics of identity and difference. Analysed discursively there exists a multiplicity of identities in the data, each based on a number of different labourings of division. I argue that these identities stand in a particular set of power relations to each other, thus rendering management codes fundamentally differentiated knowledges and thus the 'property' of a few privileged identities within the organisation.

## **5.6 'Identifying' Management Rationality**

In this section I demonstrate the multitude of identities which exist within the organisational contexts I researched and suggest that this provides evidence of the fundamentally political nature of the management codes outlined in section 5.5. I argue that these identities are not unitary and homogeneous constructs based on simple binary oppositions of male-female, manager-worker, young-old etc. Rather I suggest that these identities lie at the intersection of a number of different discursive divisions e.g. white, male, middle-aged, manager, and as such are themselves multiplicitous constructs. This section relates then to category three of Figure 5.2. I begin by examining the ways in which the managers mobilised divisions of function.

### **5.6.1 Functional Divisions**

One of the most contentious divisions found within the data was based around organisational function. In particular the separation of the service support and warranty departments in the German organisation was regarded as problematic by the Bigtruck managers who took charge of both these functions. Cameron, in an interview, talks about the division in the following way (Tape 28A, Transcript p. 93):

(...) I think one of the biggest problems that we have is that we have separate warranty and service departments over there, they are not together which is crazy (...). Vera handles the warranty, she is pigeonholed, she gets fed stuff by people so she is compartmentalised, where at management level you see all sides of the business. The two should not be divided. Service and management should be dealing with that aspect and commercial aspects. It's a fundamental (...) I certainly see that as a very poor strategy (...). Any time in the meetings a commercial situation arises, then the service guys say it is nothing to do with me, don't want to know about that, back off (...). It's the service manager's responsibility. He sees both sides of the business, he sees what is going on in the field from a technical standpoint, he sees the costs that come through which are resultant or a manifestation of either product problems, material defect problems, workmanship problems or abuse and he has got the intelligence to go through that and say ok this is an issue which should be paid for and resolved by the manufacturer or whatever and they do get that to a certain degree. But this compartmentalisation, working in boxes does not lead to that. It's not even effective.



What is important about Cameron's quote is not so much that he sees the separation of service support and warranty as 'poor strategy' or 'not effective', but that he uses this division as a resource for identity-work. For what he is asserting above is that it is only managers who have an overview of *both* the technical (service support) and commercial (warranty) sides of the business, such as himself, who can deal effectively with problem situations in this area of the business. Those that do not have this overview, by implication Vera, Dieter and Hans, cannot possibly be such effective managers. In relation to Vera, for example, he describes her in a very passive role of simply receiving information from people and processing it. He makes her task seem rudimentary, not at all proactive and certainly not managerial, a point underlined by the comparative reference to a 'management level' on which 'you see all sides of the business'. He then goes on to posit the ideal of the 'service manager' who is, on the one hand, a good engineer (he sees what is going on in the field from a technical standpoint) and on the other, a good manager (he has got the intelligence to go through and say ok this is an issue which should be paid for). Cameron's outline of the service manager who straddles this functional division is based on a host of value judgements about himself and his colleagues. What he is implicitly presenting here is an idealised construction of Self, given that he is the only participant in the study (with the exception of Pete) who handles service and warranty issues, as a good engineer and a good manager. In turn therefore he is constructing his German colleagues as less effective.

Although in the case above the functional division provides the means for differentiation, it can, like all divisions, also create the conditions for identification. Take, for example, these turns from Service Meeting Two on the retarder problem (Tape 14B, Transcript pp. 59-60).

*Hans:* You still have a retarder pressure problem. Well we wanted to be fair. I mean eh we would like to point out this letter once more and to the paperwork that we gave you in connection, you know, Fritz Peters and from Vera to assess cost of seal failures, you recall this (...).

*Pete:* Yeah, yeah, yeah.

*Hans:* Well this also includes some of these seals and we wanted to be very fair. We service people are very highly concerned with the reason eh only secondary eh result should be what does it cost, but we want (mumbled).

Significant in Hans's final turn is his assertion of a category called 'service people' to which, as the pronoun 'we' suggests, he feels he belongs. This is a clear act of identification on his part. He seems to be identifying something of a service 'culture' here and one which is primarily concerned with technical rather than commercial issues. Here the functional division serves to create a boundary for the demarcation of a 'service' culture. Even Cameron uses the division to engage in identification work. A little after this turn from Hans, Cameron retorts (Tape 15B, Transcript p. 82):

See I'm sure you understand being an OEM yourself you've got situations that arise everyday and believe me I go a lot further in doing things on Bergbau and that. Customer satisfaction is top of our list (...).

In this case Cameron is creating a bond between himself and Hans, as fellow 'OEMs'<sup>72</sup>, seemingly in this instance in order to promote his understanding of a delay in the resolution of a technical issue. Indeed, in 'performing' further this bond, he goes on to assert his commitment to the Bergbau relationship with recourse to a fundamental tenet of 'good' management, namely that of satisfying his customer before all else.

Although the functional division between service and warranty was a fundamental and recurring theme throughout the data, this was not the only boundary which was drawn on the organisational map. In particular organisational relations between service support and engineering, between engineering and design, and between service support and the sales department also provided lines of division for managerial sense-making.



An important point to be made about all the functional divisions presented in this subsection however is that, although they are interesting in themselves, they become a vehicle for other labourings of division based *inter alia* on occupational or professional divides. I consider these at greater length in section 5.6.2.

### 5.6.2 Functional/Professional Divisions

In my outline of the meaning of management rationality I emphasised and exemplified at length the importance of engineering codes and engineering identity to the managers in this research study. It was important to them to be seen to be ‘good engineers’ and to be engaging in ‘good’ engineering practice. Being an engineer was a professional division which was central to the managers, and an identity which they consistently performed. Two short examples can demonstrate this. The first is from Service Meeting One and is a short discussion on a solution to a long term problem. Rudolf wishes to know about the timeframe for a solution. He says:

*Rudolf:* We are looking for the scheduling whether or not we could succeed in changing Spain this year just before Christmas or not.

*Hans:* We still have two weeks.

*Rudolf:* What is the ability of your fitter?

*Cameron:* He is an engineer not a fitter, engineer, I have said it already, my engineer is available when the material is available.

It would seem that in the above turns Cameron is trying to assert the credibility of his colleague whom Rudolf referred to as a ‘fitter’, by insisting on his identity as an engineer. In his insistence, Cameron is propagating and thus reinforcing the desirability of this identity. And similarly in service meeting two when discussing the Jacobs brake, both Dieter and Cameron draw upon the professional identity of the engineer in their turns (Tape 14B, Transcript pp. 52-53).

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<sup>72</sup> OEM stands for Original Equipment Manufacturer.

*Dieter:* From an engineering point of view, I personally don't understand how a 5-cylinder Jake brake on a 6 cylinder engine has (...).

*Hans:* It doesn't allow (...) (Dieter interrupts).

*Dieter:* How can you achieve 5 cylinder being pressurising.

*Cameron:* OK being technically minded as well, I just look at the torque we couldn't match with a 6 cylinder so we had to reduce the torque so we said to Jake, that's the issue, they came up with a solution, fitted it and I accepted that.

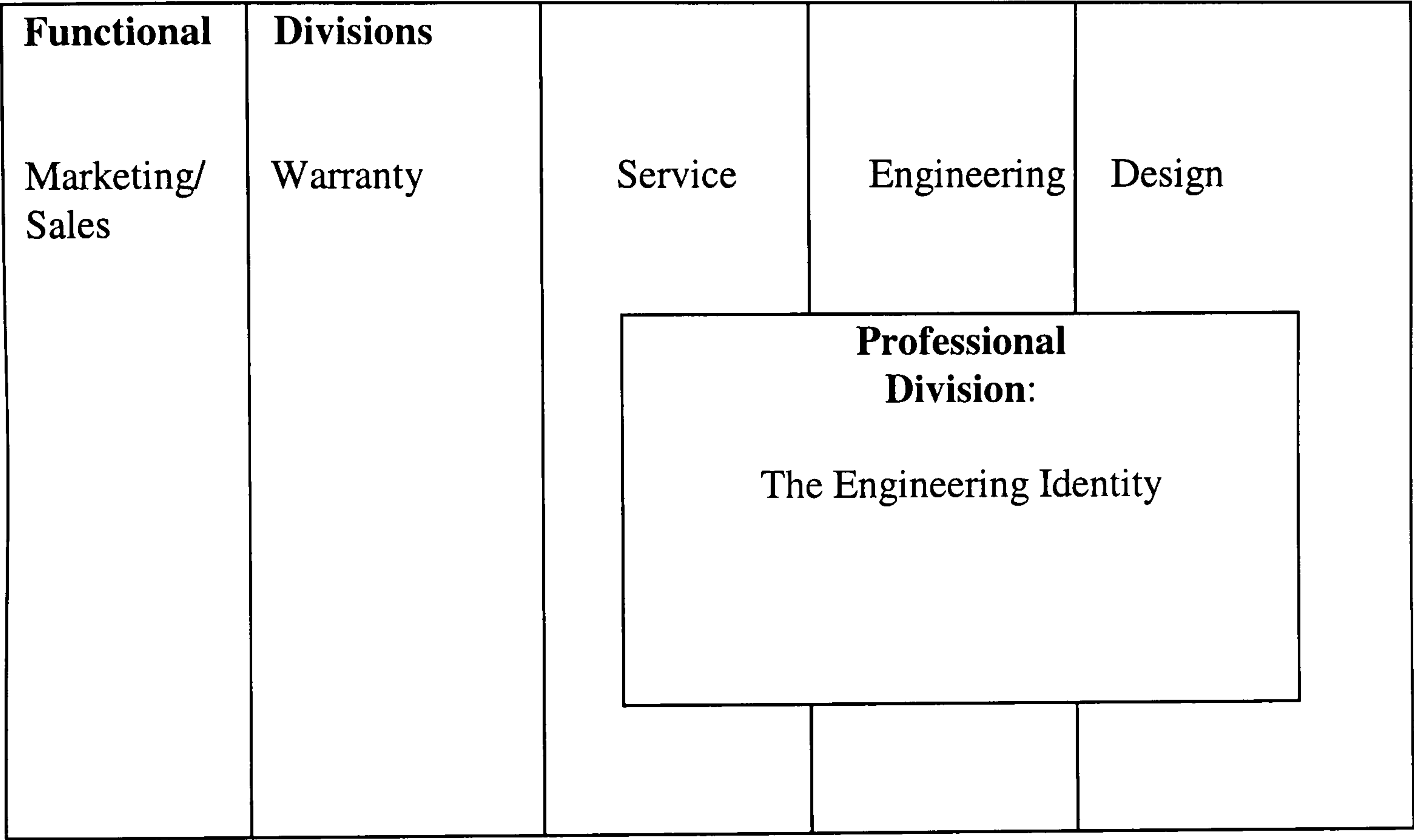
It is Dieter who initially engages in this identity work by classifying and categorising his questions as an engineering matter. This has the effect of giving his question some force, it is somehow more 'real' because it is an engineering problem. Such an interpretation might be strengthened by considering that Cameron, in his turn, would seem to mirror this move by insisting that like Dieter, he is 'technically minded too'. Being 'technically minded' rather than not, being an engineer rather than not, would seem to underline the importance of the division between engineers and non-engineers. However, to come back to the point alluded to at the end of the previous section, this professional division also intersects with functional divisions. In other words the functional divisions are employed as a vehicle for making further organisational divisions.

To demonstrate how, take the example of the professional identity of the warranty department at Bergbau, a subject already talked about in the last section. Both Cameron and Pete repeatedly highlight the fact that the result of 'compartmentalising' (Cameron) service and warranty means that the warranty department has little technical perspective on the claims being pursued. As a result of this, there are frequent disagreements in the warranty meetings over engineering matters which lie at the root of many claims. The warranty department at Bergbau was therefore seen to lack the professional identity of the engineer. It merely provided an administrative function. What this suggests is that the professional division of engineer/non-engineer only intersected with the functional



division of service/warranty (and others like sales, design etc.) in certain places. I have tried to demonstrate this visually in figure 5.6.2. The figure is divided vertically into separate strips which denote certain functional divisions (engineering, service, warranty, PR etc.). The shape below instantiates the professional division utilised to construct an engineering identity.

**Figure 5.6.2: Divisions of Identity: The Intersection of Profession and Function**



The diagram is intended to show how functional and professional divisions intersect. In this regard, the diagram indicates how the professional identity of the engineer was only attached to certain functional divisions of the respective organisations, namely engineering, service and design and not to sales, marketing/PR or warranty. The significance of this is that those who work in these latter areas are regarded as being ‘non-engineers’, a label which enables them to be conceived of as somehow less professional compared to those who possess this label. We can, however, add to this complexity by considering the ways in which divisions of age and/or generation also serve as a means of identification and differentiation by intersecting with divisions of function and profession.

### 5.6.3 Functional/Professional/Age and Generational Divisions

The first instance in the data where divisions of age and generation were articulated explicitly was in the first Service Meeting. It was instantiated during some small talk between two agenda items somewhere near the beginning of the meeting. As this was the first meeting I had attended and the first time I had met Hans and Dieter, all the participants were a little curious about my project and my background. This curiosity led Cameron to ask (Tape 4B, Transcript p. 21):

*Cameron:* Have you studied in Germany?

*Researcher:* I have. I was in Augsburg for two semesters. I am going back to Reutlingen in September.

*Hans:* A nice part of Germany. I am from Stuttgart.

*Researcher:* I am looking forward to going.

*Cameron:* As long as you keep off the beer.

*Researcher:* I always arrive the week after the Oktoberfest.

*Pete:* Us young fellows don't get involved in that do we Hans.

In this particular episode it is Pete who is responsible for introducing the age/generational division into the conversation. Through his ironic use of the term 'us young fellas', Pete is playing with the binary of young-old by juxtaposing the category to which we expect he would belong (Pete is 63 years old). What he seems to be doing in using this juxtaposition is creating a bond between himself and Hans by inviting him to agree with the statement that as 'young fellas' they 'don't get involved' in drinking beer. This is a clear act of identification which binds together Pete and Hans not just linguistically but also in the hearty laughter which follows Pete's statement and brings this instance of small talk to an end. However it is not just as a resource for humorous small talk that divisions of age are mobilised. They are also mobilised in conjunction



with some of the divisions already outlined in this chapter as the following data illustrate. First of all, this quote from a post-meeting interview with Hans demonstrates the intersection of professional, functional and age/generational divisions. Hans is reflecting on the issue of gauges and capillary tubes which had been important during the meeting. He says (Tape 9B, Transcript p. 5):

Yes one has the impression sometimes coming back to the gauges that certain instances, certain parts of the dumptruck have always been there and possibly from engineering department like for instance gauges with capillary tubes. They are young people and I dare say hardly know the function of a capillary tube because they keep mentioning in reports that the cable as cracked. Now this is a hollow tube with a hole in it passing the temperature up to the gauge whereas nowadays you have sensors, electrical sensors and in fact the cable between to replace something with a more modern item that it takes so long.

Through his use of the divisions of age ('they are younger people') and function (engineering department), Hans is identifying a clear category of organisational employee (young engineers) here whose professional identity he goes on to undermine. However it is not so much an age but a generational division which is important in his undermining of the young engineers' identities. He asserts this for example through his comparison of the capillary tube, a more 'traditional' method for fixing the problems with the gauge, and the electrical sensors, a 'modern item', used 'nowadays' by young engineers to fix such problems. Here he is implicitly suggesting that this 'new way' of fixing things is much more trouble and less efficient than the old way of using a capillary tube. In so doing he is also able to imply that 'young engineers' nowadays have less detailed technical knowledge than they did in Hans's generation and that, by extension, they are therefore not as good engineers as those of his 'generation'. His assertion of their lack of knowledge enables him to undermine their professional identity. Furthermore, through the organisation of these divisions demonstrated above, Hans enables himself to construct two desired identities. First he is able to assert his professional identity as a good engineer through these divisions and second he is also

able to assert his greater experience in the business, ‘engineers had better knowledge in his day’.

Further evidence of the intersection of these divisions by Hans is to be found in Service Meeting two. In this meeting he returns to the very issue of pressure gauges mentioned above (Tape 14A, Transcript p. 37).

*Hans:* With the window, with the time window, it was very difficult to understand and eh after detecting the fault in production, yet some of the faulty ones had entered the supply panels and could not be stopped any more. Now since capillary tubes, and this is where Dieter has probably got this notion, are very vulnerable and I even have the impression that younger people don’t even know it any more, they may consider it a cable, a kink or something, and eh anyway they cause a lot of trouble (...).

*Pete:* I think what we’ll do Cameron, we’ll take it.

*Cameron:* I have been speaking to the young lad that’s designing it. Jim Moffat is designing the new cab at the moment for introduction later this year.

On this issue Hans is asserting his superior professional identity through his use of age and generational divisions. He explicitly states that there is something missing in the knowledge of young engineers who are not aware of more ‘traditional’ engineering fixes for problems with pressure gauges. In this case, Cameron too joins Hans in deploying these divisions, although for him I would suggest that it is more a matter of age than generation which allows him to do this. Given that he is only in his late thirties, he is ‘older’ than the young engineers, but younger than Hans. As such he is not of the same generation as Hans, although he would purport to enjoy the same professional status. Indeed, his reference to ‘the young lad that’s designing it’ would seem to suggest that he is identifying himself with Hans in terms of his professional identity as an engineer, rather than generationally. As in the last section we can attempt to represent these labourings of division and the subsequent identifications and affiliations which they create with the aid of a diagram (please see Figure 5.6.3).



**Figure 5.6.3: Intersections of Functional/Professional/Age and Generational Divisions**

Functional	Divisions			
Marketing/ Sales	Warranty	Service	Engineering	Design
<i>Young/ new generation</i>		<b>Professional Division: The Engineering Identity</b>		
Age/Generational Division				
<i>Old/ previous generation</i>				

Through the intersections of function/age and generation/profession, Hans is able to represent himself as an experienced, service engineer of the ‘older’ generation, whereas Cameron, given his different age, constructs himself as an experienced, service engineer of the ‘younger’ generation. These data suggest several things. Firstly they suggest that identities are created through the organisation of multiplicitous divisions. Secondly and conversely they suggest that difference is created through the emergence of identities and affiliations. Thirdly the greater the number of divisions deployed, the greater the possibility for multiplicitous identities. In the above case, Hans and Cameron deploy the same divisions, but construct slightly different identities. Fourthly there are issues of value judgements and, in turn, sets of power relations involved in the mobilisation of these divisions. Value judgements are for example contained in Hans’s assertion of his superior professional identity as his comments on young engineers suggest. He is clearly evaluating their engineering capabilities and in so doing positioning himself favourably within the discourse of engineering. Such an act of positioning is an act of discursive power working from the power/knowledge couplet which accompanies his

labourings of division. In particular the power/knowledge couplet which accompanies his deployment of age and generational divisions creates the conditions for him to subordinate younger engineers in engineering discourse whilst at the same time privileging his own identity. Having highlighted the ways in which divisions of function, profession and age/generation are organised to intersect with each other in my data, I now move to consider the deployment of gender divisions.

#### **5.6.4 Functional/Professional/Age/Generational and Gendered Divisions**

Before going on to consider the specific deployment of gender divisions in the male managers' talk and in the interactions between them and Vera, the only female manager in my study, I would like to comment more broadly on the gendered divisions which seemed to exist within both organisations. In this regard, it was noticeable that divisions of gender were patterned and instantiated organisationally in very similar ways. For example in terms of organisational function the majority of marketing/PR staff in both organisations were female; the vast majority of engineers male (in Bergbau all the engineers were male); all the receptionists, secretaries and PAs whom I met were female; all the canteen staff at Bergbau female; all the porters at Bergbau and janitors at Bigtruck male. Moreover when we were in the meetings, all the teas, coffees and sandwiches were served by women. In Bigtruck it was Cameron's assistant who served us with food and drink. Although this was one of her tasks, the rest of her time was spent doing administration. By contrast, at Bergbau there was a dedicated 'canteen service' which provided food and drink. This was referred to in German as *die Bedienung* (literally meaning 'the service') and it consisted entirely of middle-aged women whose organisational role serving the middle-aged, senior male managers became institutionalised through *inter alia* their demeanour and their dress. They seemed to enter and leave the room apologetically, at great pains to make as little noise



as possible (not to disturb the ‘men’ at work) and wearing aprons and hats which served to mark their social and organisational identities. These short observations suggest that there existed distinct and ‘traditional’ gender divisions within both organisations. Women tended to occupy administrative, secretarial, non-technical, catering and other ‘lower status, non-managerial’ positions. Men by contrast occupied technical, engineering, non-administrative, ‘higher status, managerial’ positions. It might be suggested therefore that men within these organisations occupied what are traditionally perceived to be ‘male jobs’, and women traditionally ‘female jobs’.

The most notable exception, which seems to ‘prove the rule’ of traditional male-female divisions within this organisational setting, was a female engineer who worked in Bigtruck. The way that she was talked about shows that when a woman does come to occupy what is traditionally seen to be a position of the male organisational preserve, that her credibility to do the job well might well be undermined. As an example, take the following short episode from Service Meeting One between Cameron and Hans. They are discussing a specialised engineering fix for Vanner box problems (Tape 9A, Transcript p. 86).

*Cameron:* The girl in engineering does it too.

*Hans:* But is she, with all due respect, able to know (interrupted).

*Cameron:* She’s an engineer.

*Hans:* Yeah (slight laugh) but it requires certain specific knowledge, quite apart from her engineering skills.

Although Cameron’s interruption would seem to indicate that he is anticipating Hans’s comments on the credibility of Bigtruck’s female engineer, what Hans’s turns illustrate clearly is his assumption in this case, and perhaps more generally too, that women do not have what it takes to be fully fledged engineers. Although Cameron reproaches

Hans for this assertion, as we shall see in the remainder of this sub-section, he was also responsible for deploying divisions of gender in his identity-work.

What I have been attempting to illustrate thus far is that the organisational context in which I did my research was a fundamentally gendered context. It is important to note however that these gender divisions did not just exist on their own, but were implicated in the mobilisation of other organisationally specific divisions such as those of function, profession, age and generation. To demonstrate this I now turn to examine the ways in which the male managers talked about and interacted with the only female manager in my study, Vera. It was in these interactions that some of the most explicit deployment of gender divisions was visible. The following part of the transcript documents the first mention of Vera in the taped meetings. In this particular case, the managers are attempting to 'introduce' her to me, albeit vicariously. The episode comes from Service Meeting One and the participants have just been discussing a problematic engineering issue (Tape 9A, Transcript p. 91).

*Hans:* It seems to worry him a little bit.

*Pete:* Vera worries him. Are you coming to the warranty meeting as well?

*Researcher:* Next week, yeah.

*Pete:* And meet the delicious Vera, eh, smoky Joe. Cameron says that when you kiss her it's almost like kissing (...).

*Hans:* You know her, she almost provoked the (...) teeth discolouring from smoke.

*Pete:* Terrible she is a bag of nerves when she can't smoke isn't she? She keeps going for smokes and she is such a nice girl as well.

*Hans:* It seems to be her way of compensating for certain stresses you know.

*Pete:* I can't remember the sexist remark there. You are attacking our lady engineers, now Vera (all laugh as if she were an engineer).



There are several interesting elements in these turns. Firstly, the fact that Vera is a heavy smoker is central to the way in which she is represented to others. Her smoking is seen to be a negative aspect of her identity. On the one hand it is the result of the 'nerves' she suffers in her job, thus suggesting that she is not calm and in control of the job that she does, an interpretation reinforced later in this sub-section. On the other hand, Pete's phrase 'and she is such a nice girl as well' implies that her smoking renders her less of a 'nice girl', somehow less attractive. Indeed, this would seem indicative of the aesthetic representation of Vera in this episode also contained in Hans's reference to the discolouring of her teeth. The fact that she smokes renders her 'less nice' and 'more ugly'. Connected to this point, secondly, is the way she is represented sexually as evidenced in Pete's comments about Cameron kissing 'the delicious Vera'. Although expressed ironically, Vera is likened to some kind of tempting food, a common resource in constructing the sexual identity of another. This is the only transcribed piece of talk of a sexual nature, although in 'backstage' locations Vera's gender also provides the resource for her construction as a 'sex object'<sup>73</sup>. Moving on from the aesthetic and sexualised representations of Vera are two characterisations which deploy divisions of age and professional identity. Going back, thirdly, to Pete's reference to Vera as a 'nice girl', it is a division of age which enables Pete to create this diminutive and pejorative picture of her. Divisions of age are mobilised in other contexts in similarly pejorative ways when constructing Vera. For example in a post-meeting interview with Cameron and Pete, Cameron talks about Vera in the following way (Tape 28A, Transcript p. 93):

She is left, she is a slip of a girl, she has got no appreciation of the business from a technical standpoint. She just thinks about getting the claims and putting them away.

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<sup>73</sup> It should be noted that this 'sexual' construction of gender is implicitly based on an intersection of gender and sexuality. Vera was being framed within a predominantly male, heterosexual orthodoxy.

And similarly in Warranty Meeting Three (not taped), Pete says that:

I feel very sorry for this girl. She has all this stuff dumped on her and it's not fair.

Pete is in his early sixties and Cameron late thirties. Vera is in her late twenties. These differences in age provide the resource for the above constructions. A further point needs to be underlined here, namely the fact that this division of age provides a vehicle for the participants to mobilise other divisions which are deemed relevant in constructing Vera's identity. In the example above, divisions of age are closely related to professional and functional divisions. Signifying her as 'a slip of a girl' enables Pete and Cameron to cast aspersions about her professional identity, and more particularly allowing them to construct her as a 'non-engineer'. This intersection of age and professional division, coupled with the functional location of Vera within warranty (the 'non-engineering' department), provided a common vehicle for the construction of Vera's identity. However, it was principally Vera's professional identity which was most frequently constructed by the other participants. To demonstrate this, I give several examples from the data where Vera's identity was constructed in interaction<sup>74</sup>.

In each and every warranty meeting I attended Pete, and more especially Cameron, consistently passed comment on Vera's credentials as an engineer. In the first Warranty Meeting for example the participants discussed the issue of a faulty part which had caused the breakdown of a truck. Having carried out a preliminary inspection of the part, Bergbau wished to test the part further on a special performance tester. In this particular case an argument ensued about the exact cause of the technical failures. In explaining how she saw the problem Vera asserted the importance of pump size and

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<sup>74</sup> These data emanate from the warranty meetings. It should be noted that Vera was not willing to be tape-recorded thus making a full and accurate recording and transcription of interactions in these meetings impossible. The data in this sub-section are reconstructed from my observation notes.



general pump performance in her account. After outlining this, Cameron retorts (not taped):

Are you an engineer now? I don't mean to be impudent but again you're making claims without any evidence to back it up. You're not an engineer.

Given that this was the first time I had attended a Warranty Meeting, I remember being struck by the very personal and direct nature of Cameron's comments. Here he is very explicitly telling Vera that she is not an engineer and therefore that she has no relevant knowledge or expertise with which to back up the claims she is making. Cameron very clearly draws upon professional divisions here and places Vera in the 'non-engineering' category. Following the above sentences, Cameron launches into a very long-winded and technical explanation for why the problem does not lie with the pumps. What this serves to do is to enable him to assert and 'perform' his own professional knowledge, thus creating for himself a superior identity as an engineer and in turn reinforcing his picture of Vera as a non-engineer. Interestingly this particular issue on pump performance re-appeared in the Service Meeting later that afternoon. Hans comes to this item on the agenda and, using information given to him by Vera, asks a question about pump performance. Specifically he says (not taped):

*Hans:* Do you offer something in the way of training or instructions to your people in the field because it is maintained that the pump capacity, the cooling pump capacity (Cameron interjects).

*Cameron:* Yeah Vera told us that yesterday.

The sarcastic tone with which Cameron says this, and the grins from Hans and Pete which accompanied the statement, demonstrate two things. Firstly, they show how identity-work can be carried and re-articulated from context to context. Secondly, it shows how identity-work can be carried out within the context of a specific tacit and shared knowledge about a person. In this regard, the other managers knew exactly what Cameron was inferring about Vera (that she is not engineer) even from these few words.

There was a resource already present and common to the participants for this construction. This is just one example of how the participants drew upon professional divisions to construct Vera. Another example from Warranty Meeting One included a discussion on MIR 19 where Vera had made a warranty claim against Bigtruck on a faulty spring. This is an issue which had been discussed on several previous occasions, a point emphasised when the discussion of this item is launched with Vera resolutely declaring (not taped):

The spring was installed in the factory.

Pete then replies immediately with:

Engineer Vera.

And then Cameron with a simple:

Please.

As with the last issue, this acts as a cue for Cameron to seek recourse to complex engineering discourse not so much to prove that the spring was not installed in the factory but to articulate on a tangential technical issue. What he is doing here is taking the opportunity to assert his engineering expertise once more in Vera's face. Indeed the performativity of his turn is demonstrated at the end of his conjectures when he slams his fist down on the table and says (not taped):

I will not compromise on this.

Vera responds by lighting up a cigarette and refusing to say anything else until her boss, Rudolf arrives for the meeting. Similarly in Warranty Meeting two on the heat exchanger issue, Cameron attempts to explain the technical aspects of the problem and Vera tries to interrupt him with an alternative account. Cameron responds to this in this way (not taped):

Vera just let me finish. I didn't know you had taken up a doctorate in engineering. There's something wrong in the state of Denmark. This claim stinks.



When Vera leaves the room after the very end of the meeting, Cameron retorts (not taped):

She gets on my nerves and she doesn't have a clue engineering wise.

And again in Warranty Meeting Three, Cameron gets technical on a bearings' failure and, without any provocation from Vera this time, says (not taped):

Vera, basic principles of design. I don't think you studied engineering did you?

After this comment, he stands up, goes to the white board in the meeting room and proceeds to give Vera a ten minute lecture, with drawings, on the properties and functions of bearings. This is performativity *de rigueur*.

What these last few examples demonstrate is the centrality of professional divisions to the construction of Vera. As I have already pointed out, these professional divisions can intersect either with gender and age or generational divisions on the one hand to create certain identities or functional identities on the other hand to create different ones. For example in the following quote, Cameron asserts that warranty claims require some engineering knowledge which Vera does not possess, thereby demonstrating the intersection of functional and professional identities (not taped):

There's a lot of technical input in warranty claims which are dumped on Vera. You need a technical background to audit claims and she's not got help to do it.

However, it is not just Vera's professional identity as an engineer which Cameron consistently contests. At a more general level, he also places question marks above Vera's capabilities as an administrator (Cameron never actually refers to her in managerial terms at all, although he uses managerial principles to evaluate her, hence the appellation administrator). To give just one example of this, I return to the episode which I outlined at the beginning of the sub-section from Warranty Meeting One on pump performance. Just after Cameron had issued a rebuttal of Vera's account of pump

performance, Vera ignores Cameron's long-winded explanation and proceeds with another line of argument about oil. Specifically she suggested that it may be the specific properties of the oil which Bigtruck recommends to its customers which had caused the technical difficulties. Cameron replies 'It has nothing to do with oil' and after a few moments silence, the interaction is broken with the return of Rudolf to the meeting. It is at this point that Cameron diverts his attentions away from Vera's engineering capabilities to her administrative capacities.

Unlike previous exchanges, Cameron in this instance directs his constructions of Vera's professional identity not to Vera herself, but to Rudolf. He does this immediately upon Rudolf's entrance by addressing him directly and asserting that there was too much 'flippancy' in the way in which Vera attributes technical explanations to faulty trucks. He urges care to be taken in dealing with broken parts and in interpreting the statistical analyses which are conducted upon them. He says that each part must be investigated thoroughly, a proper claim made on each and that Vera should not rely solely on statistics but make more of an effort to use 'common sense' when dealing with warranty issues. Cameron says (not taped):

Vera must understand that. I want to see particular improvements in problem definition, solution proposal and action taken. You should say to your subsidiaries that they must be given an accurate account of the problem within a certain time period or forget it.

In response to Cameron, Rudolf points out, seemingly furnishing Cameron with more material for his case, that 20% of all warranty claims which go through the Bigtruck system have incorrect causes attached to them. In other words in one out of five cases, Vera has been assigning the wrong technical explanation to the claim, thus resulting in a large number of disputed cases based on engineering rather than commercial concerns. Rudolf points out that he is working on a system to improve the way in which claims are dealt with, all the while Vera is sitting very passively and staring at the documents in



front of her. Rudolf brings the exchange to an end by announcing that he is aware that Vera's technical knowledge 'is not good' but that his new system will address this very issue.

There are three interesting points about the exchange. The first is that Cameron has switched the divisions (albeit only slightly) which he deploys in constructing Vera's identity from those based on the specific professional identity of the engineer to that of a more general administrative identity. In switching these divisions he is able to construct Vera both as a non-engineer and a poor claims administrator. Secondly, because Cameron talked directly to him rather than Vera about the problems with warranty claims, Rudolf too becomes complicit in the duplicitous construction of Vera. One could suggest that in complying with Cameron's labourings of division, what Rudolf is trying to do is to identify and create a social bond with Cameron. He realises that Cameron has genuine grievances with the warranty claims procedures and is therefore wishing to be seen as a good manager who is willing to rectify the problem. A third and related point here is Vera's relative lack of resistance. Whereas she did try to resist Cameron's constructions of her non-engineering identity e.g. by refusing to interact further without collegiate support, by utilising documentary evidence to substantiate her claims when talking directly to him, she exhibited no resistance to the constructions made by Cameron and Rudolf. The involvement of her organisational senior had a clear impact on her perceived ability to resist.

What I have attempted to do in this sub-section is to explore divisions of gender within the context of Bigtruck and Bergbau. I began by arguing that both organisations, and the relationships between them, were profoundly gendered contexts with women assuming 'traditional' female jobs, typically non-engineering, administrative roles and the men assuming 'traditional' male jobs such as engineering and management. Against

this background I went on to look at the active mobilisation of gender divisions in the managers' interactions. Specifically I explored the ways in which divisions of gender intersected with those of function, profession, age and generation and, tangentially, aesthetics and sexuality. In particular I attempted to demonstrate the centrality of the gendered intersection of age and profession in the construction of Vera's identity. I was also concerned to highlight ways in which Cameron in particular was able to switch the divisions he deployed in order to construct Vera as both a 'non-engineer' and a poor administrator. Switching divisions can therefore act as a mechanism for creating multiple identities. Furthermore, as was the case in Hans's relationship to 'young engineers', what this sub-section illustrates is the workings of discursive power and the value judgements which this implicates. In the particular case of Cameron we see how he is able to subordinate Vera's identity by deploying divisions of profession and function. And even although gender is not explicitly articulated in many instances as a resource for division, it might be suggested that in the case of Vera, the ways in which the other managers construct her were profoundly gendered. This process of gendering, I would argue, has simply been masked out by the mobilisation of other divisions, notably professional ones, which occupy a privileged position within the engineering codes which dominate this particular organisational context. In other words it is not just the case that Vera becomes subordinated in this organisational discourse because she has no engineering background. This is also a profoundly gendered subordination based on the fact that she is a *woman* with no engineering background.

### **5.7 Reconceptualising Intercultural Management Talk as a Site for a Politics of Identity and Difference**

As stated at the beginning of the chapter, the aim of this research is to explore processes of differentiation and identification as they take form within an intercultural managerial setting. This chapter has presented and interpreted the findings of an empirical study of



these processes, examining in detail the ways in which the selected managers organised their identities and differences through various labourings of divisions. Using a semiotic square to organise these findings, the chapter began by highlighting a fundamental division in the managers' constructions of difference between those differences which they deemed 'cultural' and those which were purely business-related. Investigating the cultural side of this opposition, I demonstrated the managers' heterogeneous construction of cultural difference. Culture had fluid boundaries, not just those of a nation-state, and assumed various forms, from behaviours to ideas. Where culture was tied to the homogenising boundaries of the nation-state, difference took the form of comparative constructs based on a dichotomy of Self and Other. In some cases, this dichotomy was articulated explicitly by the managers, in the majority however, it was only ever the Other which assumed explicit form in social interaction. As for business differences, these were based on a specific conception of managerial identity. This managerial identity took form around the central metaphor of the problem-solving, rational manager and was substantiated in a set of codified values, knowledges, practices and institutional settings. Business difference constituted divergences in the extent to which the managers enacted these values, displayed these knowledges, engaged in these practices and perceived these spaces. As well as looking at the forms in which differences and identities materialised, the chapter also explored the contexts in which they circulated. It was shown that the culture-business opposition was in the main articulated during reflective dialogue on the interculturality of the managers' interactions. Conditions of intercultural awareness therefore provided the context for this key division. Taking each side of the opposition in turn, their contexts seemed to be dialectically constituted. Whereas the business and engineering discourses through which the managers pursued their rational identities took centre stage in the meetings and constituted the majority of my data, talk of cultural difference was confined to

‘marginal’ contexts in the interactions such as small talk or in ‘backstage’ areas like hotel bars. Moreover, articulations of cultural difference fulfilled an important social function as a source of repair mechanism when the managers’ interactions became difficult.

In addition to this interpretivist work, the chapter also explored these labourings of divisions through the lens of a Saidian inspired discourse analysis. And it is through this lens that we can begin to see the fundamentally political nature of the process through which the managers constructed identity and difference. In terms of cultural difference, the chapter illustrated the specific sets of representations, images and practices through which emerged managerial notions of the Germans and the Chinese. It was argued that these constructions of the Other are not forms of ‘naturally occurring’, or ‘freely determined meanings’. They do not represent a view from nowhere, rather they are historically and politically couched resources which serve to determine in a homogenising and reductionist manner the identity of the Other. Similarly in relation to business differences, a discursive perspective was applied in order to re-interpret the managers’ claims that these were somehow objective, neutral and a-cultural in nature. It was argued that this understanding was the result of a process of objectification through which these claims had been separated from the linguistic relations in which they took form and which subsequently served to normalise the understanding that these differences were ‘identity-less’ and artefactual. This discursive perspective illuminated the ways in which the managers’ multiplicitous labourings of divisions, deployed in the pursuit of a ‘rational’ identity, involved the creation of numerous different identities based on notions of profession, function, age, generation, gender and sexuality. In other words the purported ‘identitylessness’ of management rationality was contradictorily found to reside in a set of very distinct identities. What is important about these



identities, however, is that they did not all enjoy the same position in the business discourse within which they emerged. Some identities were more equal than others and it is this very point which suggests the fundamentally political nature of intercultural management talk.

The politics of intercultural management talk took form in the ways in which the managers' labourings of divisions served to privilege certain identities whilst simultaneously subordinating and marginalising others. In relation to the articulation of cultural differences, we saw how the managers privileged their identities as Western European engineers from 'the industrialised world' whilst at the same time subordinating the Chinese as less industrious and less industrialised members of a 'backward' nation. And similarly in relation to the codes of management rationality, we saw how a privileged identity in the meetings was an intersection of the old male white heterosexual engineer from engineering based departments, and a marginalised identity the young female, non-engineer, administrator from non-engineering departments. Indeed this politics seemed to emerge when the labouring of one particular division acted as a vehicle for the deployment of other divisions deemed relevant to the particular identity in construction. It can suggested from the data therefore that the intercultural management talk investigated in this research involved the articulation and negotiation of a plurality of discourses which provided the resource for a 'fundamental' politics of identity and difference. In the next chapter I go on to discuss these points in greater depth, showing how they relate to the international management and social theoretical literatures reviewed in chapters two and three. In particular I pursue the argument that the division between culture and business is itself an effect of the discourses of managerialism and science which predominate the organisational contexts in which the managers work.

### DISCUSSION OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

#### 6.1 Summary

*The objective of this chapter is to relate the findings of the research study presented and substantiated in the previous chapter to the international management and social theoretical literatures reviewed in chapters two and three. Following an introduction in section 6.2, section 6.3 explores the theoretical relevance of the findings for the various literatures comprising IMR. It makes particular comment about the location of difference and scrutinises closely the purported primacy of national culture in the construction of difference. In stark relief to the unitary and homogenising notions of difference presented by cross-cultural researchers, I discuss the implications of my finding that cultural difference is a heterogeneous construct. In light of the ensuing critique of IM research, section 6.4 goes on to explore in more depth the ontological implications of the heterogeneity of difference. Specifically I argue that whilst difference can be reduced to a bland objective category of analysis, it might be better seen as a subjective phenomenon which is dependent upon the human capacity for language for its existence. Although it is suggested that difference is a multiplicitous concept assuming shifting forms around concomitantly shifting boundaries, 6.4 points out that this does not mean it is a product of voluntarism. Crucially, context acts to structure and pattern constructions of difference. In attempting to explain the duplicitous capacity of difference to appear passively structured but also actively shifting, the section concludes by highlighting the managerial work of metonymic ordering in suggesting how difference might simultaneously seem hard-edged and stable, whilst also being in flux and moving between contested and sometimes contradictory social materials. Section 6.5 extends the discussion by underlining the role of discourse in forming notions of difference and thereupon takes the discussion into the realm of the politics of intercultural management communication and its implications for IMR. It suggests that a politics of difference lies in the moment of movement between social actors' discursive labourings of division and discusses the resultant implications for selected postmodern social theory. The chapter concludes by suggesting that the latter points provide a necessary conduit for the insertion of politics into IMR's objectivist accounts of difference as well as the re-insertion of politics into certain contemporary developments in social theory.*

#### 6.2 Introduction

The previous chapter presented and interpreted the key findings of the empirical study of difference carried out for this thesis. Specifically it explored the divisions deployed by the chosen managers in constructing identity and difference, and noted the ways in which they differentiated between differences which were cultural and those which were purely a matter of 'business'. In substantiating their categories, it was shown that the



notion of cultural difference assumed shifting boundaries and forms and that its oppositional notion of business difference was constructed around the metaphor of the problem-solving, rational manager and its instantiation in a number of codified values, knowledges and communicative practices. The findings demonstrated that the resultant rational managerial identity was regarded as a desired identity of and for all managers, that it transcended all cultural boundaries and that it contained within it paradoxical and contradictory materials which were suppressed through the at times homogenising nature of the managers' social agency. In addition to this interpretivist work, the previous chapter reconfigured these findings using discourse analysis and suggested that rather than being naturally occurring and a-political, notions of both cultural and business difference were imbued with questions of status, power and politics, involving the privileging of certain identities and the simultaneous marginalising of others.

The objective of this chapter is to relate these findings to the international management and social theoretical literatures reviewed in chapters two and three. It attempts to tease out the key theoretical implications of my empirical fieldwork for these corpi of research, showing where they undermine, support or add to the arguments of previous authors. I begin this chapter in section 6.3 by reflecting upon the theoretical relevance of the findings for the various literatures comprising IMR. In particular I examine the extent to which national culture could be accorded a privileged role in accounting for difference as suggested by cross-cultural management researchers.

### **6.3 National culture and constructions of difference**

As outlined in chapter two, conceptualisations of difference within international management have taken various forms depending on the particular research area examined. In this regard the second chapter explored in chronological order the four broad areas of IMR of organisational universalism, culturist and institutionalist theory,

and cross-cultural and diversity management, outlining in detail the forms which difference commonly took within these areas and the assumptions which underpinned these forms. What bound all of these research areas together was the relative importance of the construct of national culture in explanations of difference. Whereas organisational universalism for example gave no attention to the cultural in organisation studies by positing the existence of a set of organisational features which transcend all cultural boundaries, cross-cultural management by contrast asserted the centrality of national culture in understanding the organisational challenges of managing across national borders. The data generated for this thesis provide some instructive insights into the role that can be attributed to national culture in accounting for difference in international settings. As such the data can be usefully related to these four broad research areas in terms of the way in which they conceptualise the role of national culture. In this regard, sub-section 6.3.1 looks firstly at the relationship between the IMR literature and the central culture-business opposition deployed by the managers in signifying difference.

### **6.3.1 The culture-business division**

One the key findings to emanate from the interpretation of the data related to the way in which the managers drew a rigid distinction between those differences which they deemed cultural and those which were simply 'business matters'. The managers in the study were all very keen to point out that the majority of 'difference' which they experienced had little to do with national culture i.e. the fact that they were 'German' managers or 'British' managers, but was in the main a reflection of their business dealings. The majority of difference they perceived, then, was about the way in which minutes were recorded and written up, about the suitability of various engineering fixes, about how effective and efficient they were as managers etc. As stated in the previous



chapter, 'difference' was constructed as part of the managers' pursuit and presentation of a specific identity based upon notions of managerial rationality, rather than part of a national cultural identity. This has several implications for the broad areas of IMR.

Firstly in relation to the organisational universalism of the Aston School, there would seem to be an interesting symmetry between the data and the universalist explanation of difference. For the Aston School, instantiated for example in the work of Pugh *et. al.* (1963), difference was believed to reside in 'culture-free' dimensions of organisations such as centralisation or standardisation. In other words difference equated to divergences in the extent to which organisations from different nations were centralised, standardised or formalised. One could argue therefore that the Aston School believed that difference was just about the business itself, in this case manifest through organisational structure, rather than culture, in consonance with the data. There are several instances in the data where difference was accounted for with recourse to organisational structure, as contained for example in Pete and Cameron's complaints about the divisions between service and warranty, or in Cameron's related comments about lines of responsibility within the Bergbau organisation.

However the data also suggest some specific empirical rejoinders to this perceptibly comfortable connection of theory with data. Firstly, although the managers themselves marginalised the role of the cultural in accounting for difference, they did not deny its existence. They merely rendered it a secondary concern in their constructions of difference suggesting, to re-iterate Cameron's point, that it is possible to get *beyond* culture to the real issue in managerial contexts of money-making. Indeed all the employees I talked to in both organisations, including the specific subjects of the research study, articulated what they understood to be cultural differences between themselves and 'the Germans'. And it was often the case that the various social

materials associated with the organisations themselves became resources for the construction of cultural difference. As such, national culture does have a presence within organisational contexts, albeit one which the managers believe should be marginalised, and this manifested itself in certain instances in cultural commentary on organisational structure.

Secondly there is an important point to be made here about the location of difference. Pugh and his colleagues see difference to reside primarily in organisational structure rather than in the very human concept of a managerial identity. In doing this, they separate out organisational structure from human interaction and, as a consequence of the resultant process of objectification, come to write about the former as an empirical social fact which stands autonomously from society and culture. The data, however, suggest that while there are instances of difference as a function of organisational structure, the managers enact and articulate difference as a fundamentally human quality concerned with the pursuit of a desired managerial identity. In other words difference is not so much about the organisational structure *per se*, but about the construction of a specific human *identity* within and between organisations. Difference thus takes form in a different place to that suggested by the Aston School, not in organisational structure but in human identities within organisations.

Related to this point, thirdly, is the universalist assumption alluded to a few lines ago of the objectivist nature of difference within the Aston School, in other words the assumption that difference is a brute fact which exists independently of human consciousness or language. My data demonstrate that difference took form primarily, although not exclusively, through talk, that is through *language*. It emerged in the social interaction of the participants and took contextually and discursively contingent forms and polysemous meanings. Difference was malleable. It was a human construct and



fundamentally dependent on the managers' enunciative strategies for its reality, not a self-producing and autonomous phenomenon. I will pick up on this point in greater depth in section 6.4 since it is crucial to my critique of both the international management and social theoretical literatures.

Moving from the organisational universalism of the Aston School, I now look at the relationship between my data and the ideas of difference contained within culturist and institutionalist theory. To re-iterate, the key point about these schools of thought presented in chapter two is that they emerged out of a critique of the Aston School. Specifically it was argued that rather than being a universally homogeneous phenomenon, organisational structure was conditioned and patterned either by the culture or the societal institutions in which it existed. Furthermore it was also suggested in these literatures that this increasing interest in the societal or cultural contingency of organisational structures reflected (primarily US) practitioner concerns of the time. As corporations in the 1970s and 1980s became increasingly enmeshed in overseas markets, they faced challenges that could not be accounted for with recourse to universalist explanation, thus leading to an increased interest in specific societal and cultural insights.

There are two interesting findings from my data which can be related to the culturist and institutionalist perspectives. The first is that, just like these areas of theory themselves, the organisations' interest in my own study had an expressly material origin. Specifically my initial approach to the Bigtruck organisation came at a time when it was experiencing difficulties in its relationships with German clients, not just Bergbau but also its other German distributors and suppliers. It was also a time when Bigtruck's HR manager had just introduced employee training courses on organisational culture fuelled by his belief that problems in Bigtruck's culture were inhibiting its efficiency and

effectiveness. This concern for national and corporate cultures was expressed to me during my first meeting with Bigtruck's HR Director who described himself as a 'culture champion' within the organisation. Whereas he was able to articulate the nature of organisational culture to his employees, he did not feel competent in the area of national culture and hence my approach to the organisation was timely and desirable since it provided an opportunity for insight into this area. The timing of my research was therefore fortuitous since it fulfilled Bigtruck's need for strategic knowledge which might have a positive effect on the organisation's business relationships and, in the longer-term, on its bottom-line. Bigtruck's need for strategic knowledge provided a profoundly material condition for my research which served to frame the way in which both myself and my project were understood in the organisation and directly influenced the discursive presentation of the findings contained within the management report I produced. In this case the connection between the theory and the data indicates a reciprocal relationship between the material circumstances of organisations and the knowledge which is produced about organisations within these conditions. As such, this suggests that there is value in the way in which institutionalist and culturist perspectives on difference emphasise the material conditions of their research. What they often fail to do, however, is to suggest how this ultimately serves to frame the production and reception of the knowledge which they create. In short the area lacks a reflexive awareness of the social and political effects of the knowledge it constructs and disseminates.

A second point of comparison between theory and data in this area of IMR relates to the location of difference, a theme I engaged with earlier in this chapter. One of the major contributions of both institutionalist and culturist theory was the way in which it began to move away from a narrow focus on organisational structure, to an investigation of



other organisational configurations such as its human resource practices or work-related values. This broadening of the IMR agenda paved the way for the emergence of more in-depth research into cross-cultural and diversity management. As stated before, a reading of the data suggests that managers predominantly see difference to be a facet of the employee, of the human working within the organisation, rather than a feature of organisational structure. It shows that difference frequently resides for example in divergences in the enactment of various desirable work-values or the perception of exclusive organisational spaces. The data therefore support the institutionalist and culturist emphasis on the human in IMR.

There are however some points raised by the data which place a question mark over certain aspects of institutionalist and culturist theory. Firstly these latter two perspectives have traditionally defined themselves in opposition to each other, as demonstrated in chapter two with reference to their mobilisation by researchers in accounts of differences in ANIC countries (Wilkinson, 1996). It is often emphasised within this literature that institutionalist theory provides a necessary historical and societally differentiated rejoinder to the homogenising tendency of the culturist perspective. Although there would seem to be the possibility of mobilising both these perspectives in accounts of difference, advocates of these schools of thought have conventionally keep themselves at arms' length from each other by asserting the primacy of their own positions. My data however demonstrate the potential fruitfulness of mobilising both these perspectives in accounting for difference since the managers in my study made use of both points of view in articulating difference. The managers in my study demonstrated that difference is neither wholly culturally nor is it entirely institutionally defined. As such a move towards the dissolution of this socially conventionalised boundary might prove beneficial to researchers in the area.

A further point from the data which undermines to some extent these two schools of thought and which I have also already engaged with in this chapter, relates to the social interaction and social agency through which difference, be it institutionally or culturally conceived, is articulated. As Whittington (1992) points out, one of the key problems with institutional theory, and it might be added with culturist theory too, is its overly deterministic conception of the relationship between its subjects and objects of study. What this determinism serves to do is to sideline the role of social agency in organisational contexts, that is the capacity of the individual to appropriate and produce his or her own conceptions of the world, thus rendering passive the human subject. My data illustrate the importance of social agency in the construction of difference. It showed how the managers actively deployed a variety of divisions in constructing difference, how they were able to switch divisions in interaction and how they performed specific conceptions of Self and Other through language and behaviour. This is not to imply that managers' constructions were completely voluntaristic, but that the empirical constructions of difference trouble the overly simplistic dualism of voluntarism and determinism. As with organisational universalism, this is a point of critique which is expanded upon in section 6.4.

So far in this section, I have taken the empirically derived opposition of culture-business which formed the basis for the semiotic square presented in the previous chapter, and attempted to tease out its theoretical significance for the areas of organisational universalism, institutionalist theory and culturist theory. First of all, I demonstrated that national culture does have a role to play in conceptions of difference, in opposition to the organisational universalists, and that this difference resides not only in organisational structures but more importantly in the managers' pursuit and presentation of a specific identity. Taking this point forward, I supported the increasing emphasis on



the human in institutionalist and culturist theory, as well as its awareness of the role of material conditions in the production of management knowledge. However, in consonance with Whittington (1992), I critiqued the rigid distinction made between the institutionalist and culturists in accounting for difference, arguing that both perspectives can be seen to be present in my data and that as such, the dualism between the two should be collapsed. I now move to consider in more depth the significance of my data for the culturist perspective and its substantiation in the literature on cross-cultural management.

### **6.3.2 The heterogeneity of culture and cultural identity**

As demonstrated in chapter five and re-iterated at the beginning of the present chapter, national culture was accorded a marginal role by the managers in their enactment as well as their narratives of difference. However, this does not mean that it was not present in the data. The previous chapter outlined the particular forms which it assumed and the particular contexts in which it circulated. In this sub-section I relate these findings to the literature on cross-cultural management with a view to demonstrating the polysemous rather than the assumed homogeneous nature of cultural difference.

It was established in chapter two that the central concept in the cross-cultural management literature is that of the 'national manager' i.e. the 'German' manager, the 'French' manager etc. Attached to this national manager is a specific number of assumptions about his/her identity. For example the notion of the 'national manager' is predicated almost exclusively within the literature on the existence of a homogeneous national culture which is meaningful within a specific set of national boundaries. This assumes that a nation-state can be conflated with a homogeneous culture that applies to all within national boundaries but has no currency outside those boundaries. In turn this has the effect of reducing the manager's identity to a set of discrete and homogeneous

national cultural values which allow no room for identification through other markers of difference such as gender or age. Moreover it does not allow managers to distance themselves from any national cultural markers which may be thrust upon them and with which they do not identify. In other words it gives the managers no space for agency or critique. From the data however there have emerged several findings that undermine fundamentally all of these assumptions.

To re-iterate, the most important of these findings is that national culture, according to the managers, has a marginal role in their constructions of difference. For instance when Pete and Cameron were constructing the identity of Hans, they believed that it was not so much his (German) national culture, but his personality and his way of doing business which marked him as different. The latter were in no way cultural according to the managers. Indeed it was argued in the previous chapter that difference related to the pursuit of a rational managerial identity, not a national cultural one. This finding undermines the central belief of cross-cultural researchers that national culture is paramount in understanding difference within international management settings, by bringing into the equation markers of difference disparate from national culture.

A second and related point from the data pertains to the boundaries which the managers used to signify cultural difference. Whereas the cross-cultural management literature assumes that cultural difference is marked by the borders of nation-states, the data provide evidence of the managers' signification of a number of cultural differences which exist mainly *within* but also *across* national boundaries. For example we saw how the managers made meaningful distinctions between Scottish and English 'culture' within the borders of the UK, and between Bavarian and Prussian 'culture' within Germany. We also saw that difference could be signified using religious and gender divisions or, even more reductively, in terms of individual biology or personality.



Similarly the data also gave us examples of a broadly articulated 'European' culture, for instance in the discussions of the Chinese, which was typically contrasted with a broad 'Asian' culture. In this instance the managers transcended their national cultural differences in order to identify themselves as 'Europeans', and thus to signify their difference from Asian managers. In short then the data suggest that the boundaries used to mark cultural difference are fluid and malleable and depend on the particular identity which the managers wish to represent. It demonstrates that managers are aware of cultural difference within and across nations and that they do not just see cultural difference as a homogeneous construct pertaining to specific national boundaries.

A third point of critique of the literature which links together the previous two is that national culture was not the only resource drawn upon by the participants to identify or differentiate themselves. The data demonstrate that the managers constructed multiple identities for themselves and others, both in their interactions with each other and in the interviews, ranging from gendered identities, to religious, generational, occupational and sexual ones. And as the latter half of the previous chapter clearly shows, these different identities frequently cut across all of these resources such that the managers' constructions of Self and Other took form at the intersections of these various discourses. This suggests, contrary to the assumption made by cross-cultural management researchers, both that the concept of the national manager was not the only and certainly not always the privileged source of managerial identity within the intercultural space and also that the national manager was a gendered manager, an occupationally positioned manager, a racialised manager etc. The exact nature of the construction depended on the specific context. The literature on international management, and cross-cultural management in particular, has masked out the possibility that managers in international settings deploy such materials other than

national culture in signifying difference, a point clearly demonstrated by the empirical study. International management identity is thus a multiplicitous construct defined at the intersection of a number of divisions.

What I do not wish to suggest, however, is that the notion of the national manager was not present in the data. It was, but only in specific contexts (notably in 'marginal' spaces during the flow of the meetings), a point expanded upon later in this chapter. When the notion of the national manager was constructed by the participants, they did so using social materials and images which the comparative and cross-cultural literatures do not account for. This brings us then to the fourth point of critique of IMR literature, namely that its conception of national cultural difference in work-related contexts is too narrow. The data show that the managers drew upon a wider range of sometimes contradictory and paradoxical materials and images in constructing the Other. The main example of this from the data related to constructions of the German manager. In the previous chapter I demonstrated that the managers typically relied on organisational relations as a principal resource for constructing identity, in other words they used colleagues or customers they had met in the context of business as 'barometers' for their perceptions of what German culture was. Furthermore I also illustrated in Figure 5.4.6 the wide social semiotic within which notions of 'Germanness' and thus German managers took form. This semiotic included purportedly 'stereotypical' images of the Germans for example in relation to beach towels, the role of food and drink in experiencing Otherness and a wide range of sometimes contradictory adjectives such as the use of both 'friendly' and 'aggressive'. This rich variety of resources for constructing the Other, in this case the Germans, is not reflected in the pertinent IMR literatures which at most base their notions of the Other on fixed sets of work-related values and attitudes. The result of this narrow focus is the



exclusion of the multiplicity of discursive materials deployed by managers in their constructions.

From the above discussion, several key points have emerged. Firstly I have shown that national culture does not play the significant role in the construction of some international managers' identities accorded to it by IMR and cross-cultural researchers. Secondly I have demonstrated that cultural difference is shown by the managers to have fluid boundaries and to be a heterogeneous concept in light of their ability to signify differences within as well as across national borders. Thirdly I demonstrated that the notion of the national manager as a unitary construct based on a fixed notion of national culture, as portrayed in the cross-cultural literature, was problematic as the managers constructed a variety of different identities for themselves and others. These identities were multiple and cut across a number of different discourses. Latterly I also suggested that cross-cultural management's constructions of the national manager were too limited in focus to work-related values and attitudes. A wide semiotic of different social, historical and organisational materials and images were mobilised by the managers in constructing the Germans. In short then relating the data to the theory on national culture and cross-cultural management demonstrates some shortcomings in the latter's account of managerial identity in international settings. Rather than being the unidimensional construct based on a set of fixed national cultural values, the international manager's identity is a multidimensional construct involving heterogeneous and frequently shifting and contested boundaries, forms and contexts. In the next sub-section I go on to look in more detailed terms at the relation between my data and the types of comparison contained within the Anglo-German comparative literature.

### **6.3.3 Anglo-German comparison**

Contained within the section on comparative management in chapter two is a review of some work carried out into the differences between British and German management and organisations. The key text identified in this area was that by Ebster-Grosz and Pugh (1996) which I evaluated and critiqued in some depth. The importance of their work is to be found in the fact that it provides a synthesis of all previous studies carried out into Anglo-German comparison. They illustrate this synthesis through the use of two key tables which group together previous findings into three categories: management style, work attitudes and interpersonal relationships. These two tables are presented once again below, this time with an extra column added which shows how my data relate to these synthesised findings. In this sub-section I note the convergences and divergences between my findings and those of previous Anglo-German studies, and suggest that these divergences are significant in so far as they suggest some fundamental theoretical problems with the area of Anglo-German comparative management.

To re-iterate, table 6.3.3 synthesises the findings of previous small-scale, predominantly semi-structured interview-based studies and table 6.3.4 large-scale, predominantly questionnaire-survey based investigations (including Hofstede). Although a few of my findings converge with those of previous research, notably and interestingly more so in relation to the large sample questionnaire work (see for example my comments on centralisation, and the German reliance on superiors for decision-making), the vast majority of my findings diverged from those of authors such as Ebster-Grosz and Pugh. Firstly there are instances where my data reverses the synthesised findings of previous authors. In relation to work attitudes identified using small-scale interview work for example, I noted that the Bergbau managers constructed and displayed themselves as



more task oriented than their German counterparts who were most concerned with the interpersonal relationships they pursued with their customers and distributors.

**Table 6.3.3: Organizational behaviour in Britain and Germany as characterized by authors of specific Anglo-German comparisons**

<i>Britain</i>	<i>Germany</i>	<i>My findings</i>
<b>Management style</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individualistic financial approach without a common focus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collectivistic production approach providing a common focus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Germans underlined the common ‘financial’ and ‘cost’ focus of the Bigtruck managers</li> <li>However both articulated more consistently and placed more emphasis on a ‘customer’ focused approach based on the rational problem-solving metaphor</li> </ul>
<b>Work attitudes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interpersonal relationships</li> <li>Working hard is less fun</li> <li>Higher sensitivity to wage differences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overall task orientation justifies the use of authority</li> <li>Working hard is more fun</li> <li>Lower sensitivity to wage difference</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My study demonstrated the opposite in relation to task versus relationship orientation. The Bigtruck managers were more task-centred, the Germans more relationship focused on customers and distributors</li> <li>No relevant data to provide comment on attitudes to hard work or wage difference</li> </ul>
<b>Interpersonal relationships</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>‘Less like a family’</li> <li>Professional envy more likely</li> <li>More status-conscious</li> <li>Less forthright in personal criticism</li> <li>Low trust and ‘calculating’</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>‘More like a family’</li> <li>Professional envy less likely</li> <li>Less status-conscious</li> <li>More forthright in personal criticism</li> <li>High trust and ‘integrity’</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The term ‘family’ was never used, although Cameron did present himself as a committed ‘team member’, therefore placing a question mark over the comment in column one</li> <li>No data on professional envy</li> <li>Both the Germans and the British were concerned with status, particularly the status of themselves as good managers and, importantly, good engineers</li> <li>Both Cameron and Pete were forthright in their personal criticism, contrary to the assumptions of previous studies</li> <li>Both sides claimed a lack of trust on the other’s part. Mistrust was mutually perceived.</li> </ul>

**Source:** Adapted from Ebster-Grosz and Pugh, 1996: 126.

In other areas, the data also demonstrated that there was no distinct comparison to be made between the Germans and the British because they both displayed similar attitudes and values on certain occasions. Again in relation to the small-scale work, for example, whereas previous research delineated divergent German and British levels of status-consciousness, my findings suggest that both sets of managers were status-conscious to not dissimilar extents. As both were high on status-consciousness, with only the particular contexts in which this was expressed changing, my findings can be seen to differ from previous ones. A further example of this relates to management style as identified in small-scale work. Whereas the synthesised research suggests a divergence of management focus between the British financial approach and the German production approach, my findings demonstrate that both, at least ostensibly, were more concerned with a common 'customer' focus, a concept which lacks presence in any of the previous studies' coverage. Perhaps one might interpret this as a reflection of the increasing local homogenisation of global capitalist discourses on customer sovereignty across Anglo-German organisational spaces.



**Table 6.3.4: Organizational behaviour in Britain and Germany as characterized by authors of larger scale samples**

<i>Britain</i>	<i>Germany</i>	<i>My findings</i>
<b>Management style</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low institutionalization of work environment</li> <li>• Less centralized</li> <li>• Management resembling a 'market place'</li> <li>• More novel problem solving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Danger of overinstitutionalization</li> <li>• More centralized</li> <li>• Management resembling a 'well oiled machine'</li> <li>• More routine</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It could be suggested that the UK context is becoming increasingly institutionalised as evidenced by the increasing emphasis on things like performance measurement systems, quality and ISO systems within Bigtruck. Germany was seen to be highly institutionalised.</li> <li>• My data confer with these studies. The centralised responsibility at Bergbau was seen to be a problem.</li> <li>• Both the British and the Germans alike constructed their management styles akin to well-oiled machines, although this particular term was not used.</li> <li>• Both sides purported to practice innovative problem-solving.</li> </ul>
<b>Work attitudes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower expressed job satisfaction due to higher expectations of job variety</li> <li>• Higher work ethic</li> <li>• Employees emphasizing obligations</li> <li>• Emphasis on 'interesting work'</li> <li>• Lower sensitivity to wage difference</li> <li>• Lower personal dependence on superiors</li> <li>• Higher job mobility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher expressed job satisfaction due to lower expectations of job variety</li> <li>• Lower work ethic</li> <li>• Employees emphasizing rights</li> <li>• Emphasis on 'good pay'</li> <li>• Higher sensitivity to wage differences</li> <li>• Greater personal dependence on superiors</li> <li>• Lower job mobility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No data on job satisfaction as related to expectations</li> <li>• Comment on work ethic is debatable. The British managers complained that the Germans put too much work into various issues. No data on the distinction between rights and obligations.</li> <li>• Both sets of managers emphasised interesting work; no data on pay</li> <li>• No data on wage differences</li> <li>• The data confers with previous research in so far as the Germans were seen to depend more on their superiors for decision-making</li> <li>• No data on job mobility</li> </ul>
<b>Interpersonal relationships</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some degree of conflict present</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some degree of conflict present</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflict both within and between the organisations</li> </ul>

**Source:** Adapted from Ebster-Grosz and Pugh, 1996: 129.

A third axis of comparison between my data and those to be found in Ebster-Grosz and Pugh lies in the three concepts (management style, work attitudes and interpersonal relationships) used to categorise findings. What is interesting about these categorisations, like all categorisations, is their ability to render visible as well as invisible certain aspects of organisational realities. A brief glance at the third column in tables 6.3.3 and 6.3.4 shows the large number of instances where I have recorded the lack of comparable data between my study and previous ones which would allow me to comment on the ensuing relationship. What this means is that the concepts suggested by previous authors simply were not to be found and were therefore not relevant, unless construed through a large connotative leap, to my study. It might be suggested therefore that these concepts were of limited inclusive value to my research.

In parallel terms, and to re-iterate a point made earlier in this chapter, these categories can also be seen as being 'exclusive' since they provide a very narrow focus on the materials mobilised by the participants in constructing Otherness. Earlier on I commented upon the wide and often disparate and contradictory range of social, historical and organisational materials and images deployed in the managerial processes of identification and differentiation. These materials and images fall outside the categories used in previous studies thus suggesting that if I had followed the approaches of previous authors, these important discursive materials would have been excluded from my account. My findings underline therefore both the restrictive as well as the sometimes irrelevant nature of the categories used to group together and thus make sense of previous findings. On the one hand they are too broad, sweeping and generalised, but on the other they can equally be too exclusive, specific and narrow.

It is this apparent paradox between the simultaneous broad-brush generality and pinpoint specificity of previous categories of findings which brings us to a fundamental



point of critique not only of the Anglo-German literature, but of the prevailing theoretical orthodoxy of IMR. The reason for this is that the explanation of the discrepancies between my findings and those of previous Anglo-German contexts is more complex than the ostensibly 'simple' comparisons might suggest. What is at stake here is a matter of the ontology of difference, how it comes to exist and how it might subsequently be 'known'. In short all my data emerged through the language and contexts of the managers' social interactions. They were shifting, though not slipping phenomena, heterogeneous and multiplicitous, not unitary and homogeneous, and whilst appearing stable and fixed, contained contradictory social materials which were in flux, a movement suppressed by the managers' capacity for agency. Consequently, although my data can be made to stand still for purposes of comparison with previous research, as illustrated in tables 6.3.3 and 6.3.4, their essentially emergent, contested and discursive ontology undermines the frozen, discrete and autonomous presence of the functionalist categories of previous authors. In short the use of comparative constructs to delineate differences has the effect of creating homogeneous and static entities which do not have the capacity to deal with the fluidity and contextuality of their own creation.

These latter points of argumentation bring us then from a detailed critique of my data in relation to the various literatures of IMR reviewed in chapter two, to a wider theoretical critique of the ontology of the central construct of difference. In consonance with much of the critique raised in chapter two, the reconstructed data suggest that rather than being an objective category of analysis, the construct of difference is a fundamentally subjective phenomenon. The next section moves from the discussion of specific areas of IMR to address these wider ontological concerns.

#### **6.4 Difference as an objective category of analysis?**

In consonance with Redding's (1994) call for a sociologically conceived reading of intercultural management texts, this section critiques the ontological and epistemological assumptions of IMR's orthodox conception of difference with recourse to my findings. To re-iterate, chapter two outlined in some depth the theoretical assumptions which are conventionally brought to bear upon the construct of difference in mainstream international management texts. In short it can be said that in these mainstream texts, difference is seen to be an 'objective' category for analysis. On account of the seminal influence of structural functionalist theory and positivist methodology, difference has been accorded an objectivist ontology and is thus believed to be a homogeneous and artefactual concept which exists externally to human beings. Difference is seen to stand autonomously from human consciousness or language. In epistemological terms, conventional texts assume that it is also possible to come to know about difference in an 'objective' fashion through processes of scientific measurement which are believed to be value-free in nature. Predominantly this scientific measurement has taken the form of large-scale questionnaire surveys, although as the Anglo-German literature highlights, small-scale studies using semi-structured interviewing are sometimes drawn upon. Although these types of study diverge in terms of research design, they still consider difference to be a discrete and homogeneous social fact.

In chapter three I highlighted some of the problems with these assumptions using arguments from social theory and thereupon constructed a conceptual framework for this thesis based upon alternative ontological and epistemological assumptions. In drawing upon the concept of the 'labour of division' (Hetherington and Munro, 1997; Parker, 1997) and Said's (1978) discursive ideas on Orientalism, the theoretical



framework which I developed accorded the construct of difference a broadly subjectivist rather than objectivist ontology. This framework served to underline the need to understand the divisions fostered by the categories and practices which social actors use locally to construct difference rather than relying upon previous researchers' categories. Taking this perspective has allowed more of the malleable and heterogeneous nature of intercultural processes of identification and differentiation to be captured in the findings. In short the latter demonstrate that structural functionalist and positivist notions of difference are unable to account for the subtleties and complexities of actors' constructions of identities and differences and, importantly, the fundamentally political nature of these constructions. Dealing with the former point, sub-section 6.4.1 goes on to explain how my findings on identity and difference undermine orthodox assumptions that they are unproblematically fixed, stable and thus capable of scientific measurement.

#### **6.4.1 Shifting formations of difference**

The key idea contained within the concept of the labour of division is that social actors actively deploy a variety of different divisions or boundaries in order to identify or differentiate themselves from others. And it is the notion of a boundary which can be fruitfully used to demonstrate a fundamental difference between my findings and those of previous studies. The effect of following an objectivist theoretical framework is to place a fixed boundary around an empirical concept which serves to homogenise the nature of that concept and thus give it a fixed form. Take for example the concept of the national manager which is central to the literature on cross-cultural management. By placing objectivist boundaries around the concept of the national manager, the latter comes to be seen as an identity which is common to all managers within a set of national borders, thus reducing the diverse identities of these managers. Furthermore the objectivist conception of the national manager corresponds to a similarly objectivist

notion of national culture and thus cultural difference. National culture is believed to possess fixed boundaries and is also reducible according to the IMR literature to a set of fixed cultural values. Cultural difference thus became a matter of measuring divergences in fixed cultural values, a process which presupposes the homogeneity and artefactuality of the base concept.

As already demonstrated in the previous section of this chapter, however, identifying the ways in which the managers in this study constructed notions of national culture or cultural difference demonstrates that these concepts do not comprise fixed boundaries and fixed values, but shifting and contested boundaries and a wider variety of shifting and contested social materials. For instance the data show how the managers differentiated the meaning of cultural difference by marking it with a variety of different borders. On the one hand there are examples of the use of national borders to articulate cultural difference. On the other however the managers also drew boundaries within national borders, for example between the Bavarians and the Prussians in Germany, and across national borders, for example between them as European managers and Asian managers. Indeed, the use of national borders to construct cultural difference was frequently contested amongst the managers who were all able to scrutinise the simplistic correspondence between a nation-state and a national culture. And similarly difference was not just predicated on the basis of values by the managers, they engaged in a wider semiotic of difference which covered a gamut of social materials. National culture and cultural difference thus took shifting forms based on concomitantly shifting divisions or boundaries.

However it is not just in relation to the cultural that such shortcomings of orthodox objectivist conceptions of difference can be highlighted. The notion of business difference which comprised the opposition to cultural difference in my semiotic square



can also be seen to be heterogeneous and shifting in nature, rather than unitary and monolithic. As outlined in the previous chapter notions of business difference centred around the managers' pursuit of a specific kind of identity, namely a rational managerial one which took form around a problem-solving metaphor and was substantiated in a codified set of values, practices and institutional settings. Although this identity was believed by the managers to be 'identity-less', in other words they believed it to be a desired identity which was of and for 'all', a more critical scrutiny of the data showed these codes to provide the resource for a number of different identities based *inter alia* on divisions of function, gender, occupation etc. Discursive commentary aside, what was interesting about these identities was the way in which they emerged and were constructed through the managers' use of particular linguistic divisions. The use of these particular divisions provided the basis for the managers to construct a multiplicity of different identities, primarily through the way in which the divisions they drew upon intersected to form new identities. So for example I demonstrated the ways in which the managers, notably Cameron and Hans, switched or added to the divisions they used, in order to construct a variety of different identities for themselves and others. The identities implicated then in the pursuit of rational management, like the cultural identities mentioned before, took shifting forms depending on the ways in which the managers used particular divisions in their identity-work. The particular identity or difference under construction was locally contingent and not monolithically or homogeneously perceived or experienced.

Bringing these previous points together then, the data suggest that rather than being an objective category for analysis where difference is fixed, stable and ontologically autonomous, difference takes shifting formations depending on the divisions deployed by social actors and is therefore fundamentally a product of the actors' capacity for

language. It is a heterogeneous and emergent phenomenon which crucially depends upon social agency for its production. As such I would suggest that difference should be more fruitfully regarded as a subjective category of analysis, dependent upon the human for its ontology as well as its subsequent ways of knowing. In suggesting difference as a subjective phenomenon, we are able then to converge with Whitley's (1990) call for greater account of social agency in studies of international management. My findings suggest a more prominent role for social agency in studies of intercultural management and organisation.

It is important to note however that although an understanding of the forms which social agency took in the managers' constructions of difference is important, it should not imply that these constructions and meanings were simple products of linguistic voluntarism, free of any kind of determining or structuring influence. Although the managers' constructions of identity and difference took shifting formations, we can demonstrate the further complexity of processes of differentiation by considering the way in which the contexts of the managers' interactions structured these forms. Sub-section 6.4.2 develops the critique of objectivist notions of difference by commenting upon the contextual patterning of processes of differentiation, and the highlights the crucial role of metonymic ordering in creating the illusion of stable categories of Otherness.

#### **6.4.2 The contextual patterning of difference**

The relationship between theory and data examined in the previous sub-section suggests that rather than being a homogeneous and discrete category of analysis, difference is a shifting and heterogeneous construct which depends on social actors' categories and practices for its existence. Objectivist notions of difference cannot capture the complexities of such shifting forms, thus underlining the value of a broadly



interpretivist approach to studying this concept. A further aspect of these shifting forms which I was also able to identify through this approach was the way in which they were structured, at least to some extent, by the contexts in which they emerged. Different contexts seemed to conjure up ranges of more or less 'appropriate' forms of discourse and behaviour. As such the data seem to suggest a close link between the various contexts of the managers' social action and the subsequent substantiation of difference in textual form.

The previous chapter identified several instances of the patterning of text by context. In sub-section 5.4.8 for example, I commented upon the contextual patterning of constructions of national cultural difference, noting the way in which these constructions were confined to 'marginal' contexts in the managers' interactions. Talk about cultural difference took place between the 'centre-stage' discussions on the agenda items, thus reducing culture to an item of small talk. As an item of small talk, constructions of cultural difference fulfilled an important social function in the managerial dialogue primarily as a repair mechanism when the talk between the managers broke down, usually as a result of some disagreement. A second example from the data of context shaping text can be seen in the differentiation of constructions of difference according to its location on 'front' or 'backstage' (Goffman, 1959). One simple instance of this is Cameron's construction of Hans which was much more critical, even insulting, in backstage contexts as opposed to frontstage ones. Frontstage contexts were dominated by the pursuit of a rational managerial identity to a greater extent than backstage contexts. A third example of this contextualisation of difference is covered in sub-section 5.3.1 of the previous chapter entitled 'contexts of intercultural awareness'. In this section I suggested that constructions of cultural difference were frequently a product of my intervention in the research setting. I demonstrated for

instance the way in which the 'interview' format and the intercultural frame of reference which my presence inserted into this medium served to make managers construct difference using this frame of reference in ways which, in my absence, they may not otherwise have done. This form of context, I argued, served to 'interculture' the ensuing social texts.

There are several implications which can be drawn from these findings on context. Firstly, as with the previous sub-section, it demonstrates that difference is a malleable and shifting construct, in this case not so much dependent upon the linguistic differentiation of the managers, but on their linguistic differentiation in context. Secondly it shows how the same construct, say cultural difference, takes on new meanings and significances depending upon the context in which it takes form. Context can thus be seen to determine at least to some degree the ways in which the managers signify difference. A third and very important point is that the notion of 'context' is itself not a homogeneous concept. The previous paragraph demonstrates that there are different types or forms of context ranging from preceding utterances and dialogical media to social location. As such the findings suggest that it is not enough to make a simplistic connection between text and context in accounting for differentiation. It is important to distinguish specific types of context and the subsequent ways in which they order textual formations of difference. In sum the key point in this sub-section is that, although social actors actively negotiate meanings of difference, thus endowing it with malleable forms, this does not mean that these meanings are a complete product of voluntarism. Above, we saw how these were structured by context. The next sub-section extends the commentary on the balance between agency and structural accounts of identification and differentiation in my data.



### 6.4.3 The metonymic ordering of difference

One of the interesting themes to emanate from my interpretation of the data is that whilst difference in its various guises might appear to be stable, natural and obvious, this perceived fixity contained within it elements which were contradictory, paradoxical and continuously in flux. In sections 5.4 and 5.5 of the previous chapter for example, I showed how the purportedly stable organisation of materials into various cultural or business differences also accommodated a series of antagonistic and paradoxical elements which served to disorganise and render unstable these perceptibly homogeneous structures of difference. From a Derridean perspective, I argued that this disorganising work of organisation had been suppressed by the managers' capacity for social agency to 'harness' such unruly elements which threatened the stability of their social constructions of reality. What was interesting about this 'organisation of disorganisation' was not so much that I interpreted it as happening at all (my theoretical perspective already gave me this), but that it occurred and was produced through *metonymic* ordering. Again I should emphasise that I do not attach structuralist assumptions to the use of term metonymy, but use it as a vehicle to explain how difference can be both shifting and stable at one and the same time. There are two key points I would like to emphasise here. The first is that looking at metonymy would seem to give us a way of explaining how discourses can be added to or detracted from constructions of the Other. It thus gives us a way of interpreting the continuous extension, retraction and stabilisation of identities and differences in talk as they move and are 're'-moved along contiguous lines of metonymic association. This duplicitous capacity of the social agent to dislocate whilst simultaneously relocating, shifting whilst simultaneously stabilising can thus be considered as an *act of metonymic ordering and disordering*. The use of metonymy by the managers seemed to have the capacity to link together both similar and contradictory social materials and in so doing, allowed for the

construction of seemingly homogeneous and stable categories out of shifting and paradoxical discursive resources. Such an interpretation allows us in turn to extend the work of Cooper (1990) and Parker (2000b) outlined in chapter three. What I found particularly interesting about both these authors' work is the way in which they usefully problematised the fixity of language suggested by Saussurean distinctions between signifier and signifier and *langue* and *parole*. In the case of Cooper this involved the concept of 'Organization/disorganization' and in Parker's case, his concerns took the form of an espousal of the notion of dialect as a mediating structure between *langue* and *parole* and the correspondingly 'slippery' nature of language. It seems to me however that language *is* and *is not* a slipping phenomenon – it can be made to stand still through metonymic ordering and disordering. What I would like to suggest therefore is that whilst both Cooper and Parker have argued for a conception of identities and differences which shows them to work through the simultaneous organisation and disorganisation of discursive materials, they do not suggest what *form* this might actually take. In other words, they do not seem to suggest what this might look like in terms of everyday praxis. It is my contention that the syntagmatic and metonymic exploration of identity and difference affords a way of explaining the work of divisions in social action in more empirically-grounded linguistic terms. To relate this to Derrida, whilst the process of deferral in language might be considered invisible in the analysis of social action because of its suppression by social agents, an exploration of the social work involved in metonymic ordering and disordering might provide a starting point to address the question of deferral.

The second and relatively shorter point that might be claimed for this notion of metonymic ordering and disordering is that it also provides a social form which might be mobilised to substantiate Hall's (1990) notion of 'Being' and Becoming' in empirical



rather than theoretical terms. To re-iterate, a reading of the data suggests that identities and differences give the provisional impression of being unitary and stable organisations which are continuously being disorganised through the everyday praxis of change and re-historicisation implicated in the metonymic work of ordering and disordering. As such, the organisations or the 'metaphors' which flow from the metonymic ordering provide the sense of fixity and stability implicit in the notion of 'Being', whilst their deferral and flux suppressed by social actors is a moment of 'Becoming'. Metonymic dis-ordering is thus a site for the re-historicisation and transformation of social and cultural identities and differences. In short difference might be seen to be the shifting product of a plurality of extended discourses in which the metonymic order predominates.

To close this section of the discussion then, 6.4. has demonstrated is that difference is better considered a subjective rather than an objective category of analysis. The findings show that difference takes shifting forms based on shifting boundaries, not a fixed form with fixed boundaries, and that these formations are a product of social agency. However as sub-section 6.4.2 suggests, these formations are also contextually patterned thus adding further to the argument that difference cannot be considered a homogeneous concept but a heterogeneous one. Section 6.4.3 developed this further by suggesting that identities and difference can be considered the product of the everyday praxis of metonymic ordering and dis-ordering, a social act which gives identities and differences the simultaneous quality of appearing stable and fixed, but also shifting and in flux. Section 6.5 extends the commentary between my findings and those of previous authors in two directions. Firstly it adds to the argument that the shifting formations of difference are not pure acts of voluntarism, but determined by specific types of discourse as well as context. This serves to reinforce the suggestion that

difference is not an objective category of analysis, but one which is structured in this instance through the divisions of different discourses of *inter alia* nationality, gender, ethnicity, managerial rationality etc. Secondly, this emphasis on discourse provides the basis for a political recasting of the international management literature which in turn has implications for the types of social theory reviewed in chapter three. It is implicit in the following section that the workings of metonymic ordering and disordering are the linguistic and historicising site for a representational politics of identity and difference.

## **6.5 The politicisation of intercultural management talk**

Thus far in the chapter I have used the multifariousness of the actors' perspectives to critique the theoretical orthodoxy of IMR in broadly interpretivist terms. However, simple interpretivism, or trying to establish the actor's perspective, is not enough in accounting for the political workings of the managers' 'labours of divisions' as argued in chapter three. As alluded to above, the discursive re-interpretation of these empirical divisions of labour in the previous chapter highlights the fundamentally political conditions within which the managers construct identities and differences. The omission of the political from IMR's accounts of difference is a fundamental deficiency in this area and for that matter, a source of criticism of certain readings of the postmodern. This section explores the implications of the political nature of intercultural management talk outlined in the chapter five for IMR and the selected areas of social theory. Sub-section 6.5.1 looks at the theoretical significance of the forms which this politics of identity and difference took for IMR.

### **6.5.1 Difference as discursive effect**

In addition to its interpretivist work, chapter five explored the managers' labourings of division through the lens of a Saidian inspired discourse analysis. In particular it looked to re-interpret the divisions which the managers used to signify difference as products of



specific discourses of difference with historical contingencies, rather than ‘free-floating’ or ‘naturally occurring’ constructs. The previous chapter presented several instances of such discursive re-interpretations of the data. In relation to the managers’ constructions of the Germans in sub-section 5.4.6 and the Chinese in section 5.4.7 for example, I demonstrated that the specific images, practices and sets of representations used to articulate difference were not freely occurring, denotative chains of signifiers. They did not comprise a ‘view from nowhere’ (Fox, 1998). Rather they form part of wider discourses related to the identity of the Chinese on the one hand, a type of ‘Orientalism’ (1978) if you will, and the Germans on the other, a kind of ‘Germanness’. These discourses are historically and politically couched resources which the managers drew on in their identity-work that serve to reduce the identity of the Other to a set of discrete and homogeneous cultural materials.

However these materials do not just determine the Other in purely semiological terms. Importantly, they also serve to position the Other in relation to the Self in political terms. More specifically the signifier’s use of these particular discursive materials serves to privilege and render superior his/her identity, whilst simultaneously marginalising and rendering inferior that of the Other. As a deeply value-laden process, the discursive signification of difference means that not all cultural identities and cultural differences are ‘held equally’. Rather the mobilisation of various discourses serves to position these identities and differences in power relation to each other, thus resulting in the privileging of one at the expense of the other. However because of the ways in which these discursive notions of the Other are naturalised within language, these constructions cannot be seen to be politically motivated, but are accepted as natural, obvious or pre-ordained. What we have identified here is one of the key deficiencies of the IMR literature, namely its lack of a political account of cultural

difference. Where these literatures do identify cultural difference, albeit in structural functionalist terms, they do not attempt to account for its profoundly political nature, emerging as it does through language.

As the latter half of the previous chapter shows, it is not just cultural difference but also business difference which takes discursive form. Section 5.5 demonstrates that business difference is seen to reside in the pursuit of a rational-managerial identity which is instantiated through a set of codified values, practices and settings and importantly which is deemed to be a-cultural and thus a matter for and of all managers regardless of cultural background. In this respect, rational managerial identity comes to be seen as 'identityless', almost neutral, certainly not political. However by using discourse analysis we saw how this purported equality of identity for all actually masked out the work of power relations in processes of differentiation. Section 5.6 demonstrated how this rational identity was rendered the preserve of certain organisational members (primarily, male, white, middle-aged engineers) to the exclusion and marginalisation of others through the power relations implicated in the workings of discourse. The supposed objectivity and neutrality contained within this identity is the result of the way in which 'rational' discourses serve to normalise the understanding that business or management is an activity which operates 'outside' culture.

From the theory-data relationship discussed in the previous two paragraphs can be inferred a further set of suggestions about the workings of discourse both in the theorisation as well as the everyday practice of intercultural management communication. In this regard, what these previous paragraphs demonstrate clearly is the way in which discourses serve to *naturalise* certain understandings and constructions of social and cultural phenomena to the *exclusion* of alternative understandings and constructions. For instance, in relation to orthodox IMR, and for



cross-cultural researchers in particular, the primacy of accounting for difference through the mobilisation of an objectivist national culture is an understanding which has been naturalised through the discourses which frame 'ways of seeing' (Hollis, 1984) in this area. As the data demonstrate, the result of this naturalised way of seeing is that it masks out the possibility of alternative visions of this empirical phenomenon, such as the explanation of difference with recourse to other sociocultural markers.

We can demonstrate this further in relation to the managers' constructions difference. As mentioned above, unlike cross-cultural researchers, the managers believed that culture had only a marginal role to play in accounting for difference. They saw difference to equate to the divergences between them in their pursuit of a specific rational identity which was perceived to exist outside culture. On account of its anchoring in the discourses of managerialism, science and engineering, this perceived 'a-culturality' of managerial identity can be seen as a naturalised understanding of these very discourses which masks out the cultures that give rise to the marginalised identities of gender, race, ethnicity etc. These identities have been airbrushed out by the managers as an effect of the dominant discourses which frame their managerial interactions. Indeed we might extend this point to suggest that it is not just each of the oppositions of the semiotic square contained in the previous chapter through which the workings of discourse can be displayed. The culture-business opposition itself is a discursive effect of the managerialism and normal science which predominates the intercultural realities of management communication.

Bringing these points together, we can say that both the managers studied in this research, as well as the previous authors reviewed, have privileged particular understandings and constructions of difference as a result of the particular discourses which frame their perspectives. This privileging of certain constructions, which occurs

through the organisation of certain divisions of labour, has the political effect of marginalising alternative constructions based on other divisions of labour. Such political workings of discourse are rendered invisible however because of the way in which discursive formations are naturalised through language and its corresponding instantiation in social text. As well as implication's for IMR, this discussion of the political nature of difference also has implications for the social theory reviewed in chapter three. The next sub-section brings this chapter to a close by discussing these implications.

### **6.5.2 The politics of identity and difference**

In chapter three I suggested that in spite of the large theoretical gulf which exists between the assumptions of structural functionalist and certain postmodern conceptions of difference, one area of criticism which was common to both was their relative inability to deal with the political nature of social reality. For broadly structural functionalist perspectives, this criticism related to the belief in the purported objectivity of ways of knowing on the one hand and the insufficient theorisation of the diachronic aspects of social and cultural phenomena. For postmodern conceptions of difference, such as those derived from Derrida (1976) or Lyotard (1984) on the other hand, the problem lay in the tendency to epistemological relativism from which the establishment of any normative and thus political and ethical stance was rendered impossible. Given that the large part of this chapter has undermined the ontological, epistemological and thus political assumptions of IMR's use of structural functionalism, this sub-section deals more with the implications of my findings for certain readings of postmodern approaches to difference.



Chapter three reviewed the implications of chosen postmodern writings on difference, notably those of Jacques Derrida and Jean-Francois Lyotard. Although many of their ideas and substantive themes are different, what holds them in common is their writing about the status of difference in late capitalist societies. Beginning with the former, specific readings of Derrida suggest that social reality is an ephemeral phenomenon, based on slipping concepts which are constantly under erasure and therefore never able to be pinned down to signify or mean any one thing or even anything at all. Reality thus becomes an ever present movement of language along a chain of signifiers with no possibility of establishing any kind of shared reality based around commonly perceived signifieds. This ever presence of reality wipes out history and politics in accounting for the social. What my findings suggest however is that this particular reading of Derrida bears limited resemblance to the everyday experience of managers' intercultural interactions. My reading of the data shows that although difference assumed shifting forms as a result of the managers' capacity for social agency, it was not a slipping phenomenon where the managers were not able to signify a common sense of identity or difference. The data clearly demonstrate that there were constructions and understandings of difference which the managers commonly perceived, even if they did not necessarily share exactly the same version of them. Take for example the codified values, practices and settings which instantiated in text the central problem-solving metaphor for the identification of management rationality. These broadly codified signs provided a signifiatory framework for the managers' labourings of divisions. In this light, such extreme readings of Derrida's text do not seem to connect easily with the empirical data.

This does not however mean that Derrida's writings *per se* are inexorably far removed from the everyday construction of reality, merely that certain *readings* of Derrida tend

towards this. Less extreme readings of Derrida, such as those suggested by Norris (1987) or Collins and Mayblin (1996), would seem to be more empirically relevant in the case of this research at least. They suggest that rather than denying the possibility for any agreed form of reality based on a commonly perceived set of meanings, Derrida is simply arguing that the issue of meaning should remain an open issue as opposed to an impossible endeavour. Given that the shifting forms in my data demonstrate the malleability of meaning, it would seem that this reading of Derrida's complex work is somewhat more felicitous than others. Social text is therefore not an ephemeral form of reality; it has a greater propensity to common signification than this. As expressed through social text then, difference is neither a sociocultural form which works its way through free floating signifiers with no corresponding signifieds; neither is it a fixed, stable and objective category of analysis, but one which shifts and is patterned by various contexts and divisions of discourse. As such difference is neither fixed nor is it completely fluid; it works between the two, assuming shifting form. It has the simultaneous capacity to appear stable and fixed, whilst at the same time being shifted along by social actors' contextual and discursive positioning of the Self and the Other. Such is the metonymic work of ordering and dis-ordering, a concept which can help us try to elucidate Derrida's notion of deferral. We might say therefore that difference is an essentially provisional and temporary social and cultural form that finds home in the discursive spaces created by social actors' multifarious labourings of division. Difference is thus made and stabilised by a dialectic of 'Being' and 'Becoming' (Hall, 1990).

This notion of difference as a dialectical form of 'Being' and 'Becoming' is important in evaluating the usefulness of postmodern approaches to the concept of difference. It is important because it is a fundamentally political concept. It is a way of understanding



how social actors engage politically in constructing identities and differences and thus provides a conduit both for the insertion of politics into objectivist accounts of difference as well as the re-insertion of politics into contemporary developments in social theory. The politics of identity and difference in intercultural management communication lies in the moment of movement between the divisions of discourse in social actors' constructions of Otherness. As such it is not the categories of Otherness which are political *per se*. Rather it is the discursive act which allows movement between and across categories of Otherness which, I would suggest, comprises an essential politics of difference. This identification of the politics of difference within my research provides a ground for an extended critique of the postmodern this time in relation to the work of Lyotard, the other postmodern thinker reviewed in chapter three.

To re-iterate, in his (1984) report on the *Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard was specifically concerned with identifying new forms of knowledge which would reflect the contemporary conditions of late capitalist society. As such his work was expressly about epistemology and ways of knowing, rather than the social and cultural conditions of the postmodern, a more common theme for contemporary theorists. In short he advocated a micropolitics of knowledge, one which emphasised the need to conceive knowledge as locally contingent, diverse and fragmented. He critiqued Modernist notions of knowledge which relied on discursive narratives for their truth-value and argued for the co-existence of a plurality of different kinds of knowledge about society and culture. In doing this, Lyotard called for a move away from these metanarratives of truth and knowledge to a local and micro level focus for epistemology. It is this ignorance of the role of the metanarrative in the constructions of truth claims which provides the basis for one of the key criticisms of Lyotard's work. As Best and Kellner (1991) point out, the result of simply ignoring society's metanarratives of science,

patriarchy, colonialism etc. is to underplay the role which these narratives continue to play in contemporary society. By ignoring them in this way, Lyotard is perpetuating the *status quo* by not deconstructing the sometimes repressive workings of these narratives thus allowing the repression to continue unquestioned.

The findings of my research study can contribute empirically to this critique of Lyotard. For what they demonstrate, quite simply, is the continuing presence of narratives of patriarchy, science and technology, colonialism *inter alia* in social actors' local constructions of identity and difference. This is clearly contained in sections 5.5 and 5.6 of the previous chapter which show how the managers used divisions of gender, race, ethnicity, age and generation, occupational and technical expertise and sexuality to organise identities and differences. Although my research study was locally focused then and interested in how managers create difference *in situ*, as Lyotard advocates, it still aspired to highlight the work of broader narrative structures in constructions of Otherness and in particular those which took form in discursively repressive ways. Had I ignored these broader structures of narrative domination (contained for example in the plurality of patriarchal, technical and rational instrumental discourses mobilised by Cameron to 'subjugate' Vera), I would have underplayed their continuing force in contemporary cultural processes of identification and differentiation. Lyotard's work thus lacks an important political edge which renders it unable to deal with the empirical relationship between local constructions of difference and generic structures of domination and oppression.

The objective of this chapter has been to relate the findings of the empirical study presented in chapter five to the international management and social theoretical literatures reviewed in chapters two and three. It has teased out the key theoretical implications of my empirical fieldwork for these corpi of research, showing where they



undermine, support or add to the approaches or arguments of previous authors. In summary, section 6.3 explored the relationship between my findings on difference and the ways in which the broad areas of IMR approached it. In diluting the stringency of organisational universalism firstly, the section showed that national culture did have a role to play in accounting for difference, and also that although organisational structure was conceived as a repository of difference, the latter was more commonly seen as a facet of human identity. In relation to culturist and institutionalist perspectives secondly, my findings converged with their emphasis on the need to consider the material conditions of knowledge production in explaining cultural difference as well as its more prominent emphasis on difference as a property of the human rather than the organisation. The data suggested however that the conventionalised division between these two schools of thought should be dissolved since themes from both sets of authors were present in my fieldwork. Finally in accordance with Whittington's critique of both these schools, my findings demonstrated the important role of social agency in constructions of difference. Rather than culture or societal institutions completely determining identity, social actors were active in appropriating their own notions of identity and difference.

Most importantly in this section, I explored the extent to which national culture could be accorded a privileged role in accounting for difference as suggested by cross-cultural management theorists as well as the form which subsequent cultural difference might take. The data undermined fundamentally the assumptions of various cross-cultural authors. It showed that national culture played only a marginal role in managers' constructions of difference. As such the notion of the national manager whose identity is determined by a set of discrete and homogeneous work-related values found little empirical support in the fieldwork. The managers constructed multiplicitous identities

for themselves and others using a wide variety of resources to mark themselves, not just national cultural ones. They were critical of the simple correspondence between a nation-state and a national culture, as assumed by cross-cultural management theorists, and were able to construct cultural difference using boundaries which cut across and existed within those of the nation-state. Furthermore the findings suggested that managers construct difference with recourse to a large array of social and cultural materials rather than just 'work-related values'. In short, cultural difference had fluid boundaries as well as fluid forms.

The final sub-section of 6.3 on the Anglo-German literature provided a theoretical bridge to section 6.4 on the veracity of difference as an objective category of analysis. In it I mobilised the empirical findings to demonstrate the deficiencies with the use of pre-determined categories for the analysis of constructs such as difference. Specifically in relation to the work of Ebster-Grosz and Pugh (1996), I highlighted the way in which such categories have the simultaneous capacity to include as well as exclude various properties of empirical phenomena. For example there were some aspects of these categories which did not exist in my data just as there were some parts of my data which did not 'fit' the pre-ordained categories. What was at stake here was more than a matter of simple comparison. This finding concerned the ontological status of difference and the difficulty of using fixed constructs for intercultural comparison which result in the creation of static and homogeneous entities lacking the capacity to deal with the fluidity and contextuality of their own creation.

Section 6.4 dealt with this ontological issue in more depth by providing a critique of the objectivist assumptions which underpin the work of orthodox writings. Specifically I argued that rather than being an objective category of analysis, where difference assumed an autonomous, fixed and discrete ontology which could be measured



scientifically, it was perhaps better seen as a subjective phenomenon which depended on the human capacity for language for its existence. The reason for this suggestion lay in the complexities and subtleties of the social actors' constructions of difference demonstrated in the data which objectivist approaches would simply not be able to account for. This section showed that as a human phenomenon, difference was a heterogeneous and emergent construct which assumed shifting and often contested forms in consonance with a set of equally shifting and contested boundaries. Importantly however although the data highlight the role of social agency in constructions of difference, they do not suggest that these shifting forms were pure acts of linguistic voluntarism. Forms of difference were contextually patterned and thus took on new meanings depending on the particular context. The section ended by highlighting the crucial role of metonymy in processes of identification and differentiation. It suggested that social actors' metonymic ordering and dis-ordering of identities and differences provided an empirically grounded perspective on the ways in which the latter come to appear hard-edged and stable, but crucially suppress some of the paradoxical and shifting elements which 'threaten' its stability. It was suggested that such a conceptualisation of the empirical data enables us to extend the work of Cooper (1990) and Parker (2000b) by suggesting a more specific linguistic focus for an exploration of processes of identification and differentiation.

The final section of this chapter 6.5 developed these arguments in two directions. Firstly it showed the structuring influence of discourse in the construction of difference and thereupon highlighted secondly the fundamentally political nature of processes of identification and differentiation. Such an account of the political nature of cultural identity and difference was deemed to be one of the key deficiencies of the various literatures of international management research, where an implicit assumption made is

that all identities and differences are of equal value and thus equal 'worth'. The data demonstrate however that processes of identification and differentiation privilege some identities and marginalise others. And it is precisely in the movement between the divisions of discourse that the political capacity to privilege and marginalise lies. The politics of identity and difference is thus a politics of discursive movement. Section 6.5 related this discursive politics to the postmodern conceptions of difference of Derrida and Lyotard. On the one hand it was suggested that more extreme readings of Derrida were infelicitous. Reading meaning as an open rather than an impossible issue provided the basis for a political critique of social reality. In relation to Lyotard it was argued that the data demonstrate the continuing influence of meta-narratives such as patriarchy, science and colonialism in local constructions of difference, thus highlighting a weakness in Lyotard's ability to deal with the political legacy of wider narrative structures of domination and subjugation.

In closing this chapter then, it is this politics of identification and differentiation which provides the grounds for a common critique of the international management and social theoretical literatures, despite the perceptible gulf between them. As such the discussion of the findings of this research study presents a conduit for the insertion of politics into IMR's objectivist accounts of difference as well as the re-insertion of politics into contemporary developments in social theory. In the following chapter seven I bring this thesis to a temporary close. In addition to summarising the whole of this thesis, it attempts to evaluate its overall significance for the discipline of international management by stating its contribution to knowledge.



## CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

### 7.1 Summary

*This final chapter brings the thesis to a close. Its objective is to provide an overview of the thesis in its entirety and to translate this overview into a set of statements about the conclusions, contribution to knowledge, limitations and future directions of this research study. Following an introduction in 7.2, section 7.3 presents a summary of the thesis and thus a basis for the chapter's latter sections. Section 7.4 draws together the main conclusions of this thesis based on the research questions devised at the outset and thereupon states and assesses the contribution to knowledge which this project might claim for itself. Section 7.5 goes on to examine some of the limitations of the research, looking at the ways in which it might be described as 'partial'. Finally section 7.6 points to particular directions which future researchers might wish to pursue in exploring further some of the issues raised by this thesis.*

### 7.2 Introduction

Having presented and substantiated the key findings of the research study in chapter five, the previous chapter six discussed these results in terms of their relationship to the international management and social theoretical literatures reviewed in chapters two and three. It teased out the key theoretical implications of my empirical fieldwork for these corpi of research, showing where they undermined, supported or added to the arguments of previous authors. This final chapter brings the thesis to a close. Its objective is to provide an overview of the thesis in its entirety and to translate this overview into a number of final conclusions about the nature of difference. These conclusions provide the basis for an evaluation and statement of this project's contribution to knowledge. An assessment of the project's limitations as well as some reflections on the direction in which future researchers with an interest in the area might wish to take some of the issues in the thesis are presented at the end of the chapter. The chapter begins in the following section 7.3 which provides a summary of the thesis.

### 7.3 Summary of the Thesis

In summarising each of the chapters which comprise this thesis, it is hoped that the reader will obtain a clear overview of the research project as a whole, thus forming the basis for the commentary contained within this chapter's latter sections. Following an introduction to the thesis in chapter one which contextualised the project and initiated the reader into its key theoretical and empirical concerns, chapter two presented the first of two literature reviews. The aim of chapter two, firstly, was to review and critique conceptualisations of difference within the various literatures which comprise international management research (IMR), namely organisational universalism, institutionalist and culturist theory, and cross-cultural management including Anglo-German comparative studies, and diversity management. In reviewing these areas I was primarily concerned to illuminate the ways in which international management's discursive orthodoxies of functionalism, normal science and managerialism had served to structure and subsequently naturalise particular understandings of difference. To this end the chapter demonstrated how, as a consequence of functionalist normal science first of all, difference had come to be understood as a brute social fact which existed independently of human consciousness or language and about which objective, value-free knowledge could be gained. Such objectivist notions which reduce difference to a discrete, unitary and homogeneous construct were also found to be contained within organisation theory's other predominant discourse, that of managerialism. In light of these arguments, chapter two concluded that through these discourses, difference had become a kind of Latourian 'blackbox', an autonomous and self-producing reality which could be readily manipulated by the 'scientist', or in this case the corporation or corporate academic, for economic gain.



Based on these arguments, chapter two ended by drawing up a key research aim and corresponding research objectives as a framework for the subsequent development of the thesis. To re-iterate, the central aim of the thesis has been to challenge the conventional wisdom of IMR by exploring identity and difference as social processes within an intercultural management setting. This aim contained three key objectives surrounding firstly the role of national culture in constructions of difference, secondly the extent to which difference could be considered an objective category of analysis and thirdly the political nature of difference. In addition to these key aims and objectives, chapter two also concluded with the imperative of approaching the study of difference in intercultural settings from a theoretical perspective emanating outwith the disciplinary confines of structural functionalist and positivistic international management. Such an imperative reflects increasing calls from within IMR (Redding, 1994; Chapman, 1997) for a greater number and diversity of interdisciplinary approaches to the subject, particularly those of a non-functionalist and non-managerialist orientation.

Chapter three took up this theoretical challenge by setting out to establish an interdisciplinary conceptual framework for the study of difference. It pointed out that difference, and particularly notions of cultural difference, had become the focus of an increasing number of disciplines ranging from the various sub-disciplines of linguistics to social psychology, social theory and cultural studies *inter alia*. Against this diverse disciplinary background, this thesis was particularly interested in what social and organisational researchers, notably those with an interest in social theory, as well as cultural studies researchers had to say about difference. Based on this review, the chapter constructed an interdisciplinary framework which sought to account for and explain the nature of difference from a broadly social theoretical perspective. This

framework took as its key concepts the 'labour of division' (Munro, 1997; Parker, 1997) and Said's (1978) discursive work on Orientalism and conceived difference as an act of social 'work', that is the accomplishment or the production of the labouring social agent.

Having outlined the conceptual framework for the thesis, chapter four went to develop and justify the research design for an empirical investigation of the construction of identity and difference. It began by re-iterating the key research objectives and theoretical commitments established in the preceding two chapters and advocated a broadly interpretative methodology which reflected these commitments. From this methodological perspective, the chapter outlined and rationalised the design, development and execution of this project's 18-month research study into the interactions of three German and two British managers working for the two organisations Bigtruck and Bergbau. It presented the reasons for the site selection and sampling decisions and then went on to discuss the use of multiple methods in the research study, namely those of participant observation, transcription, unstructured interviewing and document collection. The chapter concluded with details of the research process itself and outlined the rationale and praxis of my strategy for interpreting the data.

Chapter five went on to present and interpret the main findings of this research study. Specifically it explored the divisions deployed by the chosen managers in constructing identity and difference, and noted the ways in which they differentiated between differences which were cultural and those which were purely a matter of 'business'. This division articulated by the managers was central in the construction of a semiotic square which I subsequently used in the chapter as a hermeneutic tool for organising and outlining the key findings. In this regard, it was shown firstly that the concept of



national culture was marginal in constructions of difference. It demonstrated that the notion of cultural difference assumed shifting boundaries and forms, and that its oppositional notion of business difference was constructed around the metaphor of the problem-solving, rational manager and its instantiation in a number of codified values, knowledges and communicative practices. The findings demonstrated that the resultant rational managerial identity was regarded as a desired identity of and for all managers and that it transcended all cultural boundaries. In addition to this interpretivist work, chapter five also reconfigured these latter findings using a Saidian inspired discourse analysis. It was thereupon suggested that rather than being naturally occurring and a-political, notions of both cultural and business difference had political qualities, involving the privileging of certain identities and the simultaneous marginalising of others within the intercultural communicative context.

The final substantive chapter six related these findings back to the international management and social theoretical literatures reviewed in chapters two and three. The chapter discussed the key theoretical implications of my empirical fieldwork for these corpi of research, showing where they undermined, supported or added to the arguments of previous authors. In stark relief to the privileged, unitary and homogenising notions of difference presented by cross-cultural researchers, the chapter discussed the implications of the finding that cultural difference was a heterogeneous construct. In light of the ensuing critique of IM research, it went on to explore the ontological implications of the heterogeneity of difference by suggesting that difference was better seen as a subjective phenomenon dependent upon the human capacity for language for its existence rather than an objective category of analysis. I cautioned, however, voluntaristic conceptions of difference by underlining the deterministic effects of context and discourse in structuring constructions of difference. It was here that I argued for difference to be seen as continuous acts of metonymic ordering and dis-

ordering, a concept which provides a way of substantiating in more fine-grained empirical terms both Cooper and Parker's respective attempts to problematise the fixity of differential language suggested by Saussure. The latter part of the chapter took the discussion into the realm of the politics of difference, suggesting firstly that IMR's lack of a political account of difference represented one of its fundamental deficiencies and secondly that it also posed a challenge to certain forms of postmodern social theory.

Having summarised each of the chapters that comprise this thesis, it is hoped that the reader will have an overview of the project in its entirety. I now use this overview as a basis for drawing out the main conclusions of this research in the next section, particularly as they relate to the central aim of the thesis and its three objectives as stated in chapter two.

#### **7.4 Conclusions**

This section states the main conclusions of the thesis and uses them as a basis for an evaluation and statement of this project's claimed contribution to knowledge. A suitable starting point for such an evaluation is to re-iterate the key issues which emanated from the discussion of the findings in chapter six. These key discussion points can be used to address the aims and objectives formulated earlier in the thesis and thereupon to draw together overall conclusions from the research project.

The first research question related to the role of national culture as a resource for the construction of difference as it is conceptualised primarily in the cross-cultural management literature. It can be concluded from a discussion of the empirical evidence that rather than being the prime signifier of difference in intercultural managerial settings, national culture plays only a minor role in accounting for difference. The empirical evidence clearly demonstrated that for the participants of this research, difference was about business, not culture. This stands in stark contradiction to the



assumptions of the cross-cultural management area. We can extend this conclusion to undermine the purported primacy of the national manager as the key concept for the theorisation of difference. Although there was some use of this concept in the managers' constructions of difference, the privileged concept for articulating difference was that of the rational, problem-solving manager, an identity which was believed to transcend all cultural boundaries. A further point of elaboration on this first conclusion, which again undermines the conventional approach primarily of cross-cultural researchers, is that cultural difference is not a discrete, homogeneous social fact. Rather it is a shifting and heterogeneous construct dependent upon the ability for language of social actors. In light of these two points, it can be finally concluded that the privileging of national culture and its concomitant notion of the national manager in certain areas of IMR is empirically dubious and thus overstated.

Secondly we can draw conclusions about the purported status of difference as an objective category of analysis, the second research objective which this thesis set out to address. In short, rather than being a fixed and autonomous entity, difference could be seen as a shifting phenomenon which was dependent upon social actors for its existence. The discussion of the data showed that difference was a heterogeneous construct which took shifting forms emerging from the concomitantly shifting deployment by social actors of various divisions of difference. It was problematic to say that difference had a fixed ontology. Importantly however, what I am not suggesting is that difference is a relativistic construct which takes form on the voluntaristic whim of the social actor without any determining or structuring components. Context for instance served to structure and pattern in sometimes very deterministic ways the actors' constructions of difference. And similarly the sets of representations, images and linguistic practices which constituted various discourses e.g. the discourse of the Germans, also provided historically differential structures

which determined many of the forms of Otherness constructed by the managers. Difference thus had the simultaneous capacity to appear as a 'structure' as much as a method of structuring. In relation to this objective then, what I am suggesting is that if I had simply conceptualised difference as an objective category of analysis, I would have missed the complexities, subtleties and fluidity of empirical processes of identification and differentiation. To conclude, conceptualising difference as an objective category of analysis is a problematic act of reductionism which masks out the complex social work involved in its creation.

In more affirmative terms however, I have also suggested an alternative, more complex and variegated way in which international management researchers might begin to approach the study of identity and difference as a processual phenomenon. I labelled this notion 'metonymic ordering/dis-ordering', an idea which I derived from a linguistic analysis of the managers' textual constructions of identity and difference. The metonymic ordering of difference is a concept then which I think helps us to understand how in everyday praxis, social actors' purportedly stable organisation of materials into various cultural and business differences also accommodates a shifting but suppressed series of antagonistic and paradoxical elements which continuously disorganise that stability. I would conclude that this extends and develops the work of Cooper (1990) and Parker (2000b) since it shows the *empirical forms* and suggests the *empirical processes* by which identities and differences might be seen as acts of organisations which are continuously being disorganised. The notion of the metonymic ordering of difference thus provides a specifically linguistic idea which future researchers might usefully pick up on and critique as a theoretical springboard for the reconfiguration of difference.



The third key area of interest which emerged in chapter three of this project was the political nature of identification and differentiation. Drawing upon Said's (1978) work on Orientalism, a discursive reading of the data demonstrated that, in direct contrast to IMR's implicit assumption that all identities and differences within and across organisations are 'equal', the social construction of difference privileged certain identities over others. The data showed how the mobilisation of specific discursive divisions served to render some organisational members 'superior' e.g. male engineers and thus more 'valuable', whilst others were simultaneously rendered 'inferior' and less valuable e.g. female, non-engineering identities. This instantiation of a politics of identity and difference within intercultural management settings is sorely lacking in the various IM literatures and thus represents one of its key deficiencies. In short the construction of difference has important political qualities which fundamentally undermine implicit IM assumptions about the equal status of managerial identity in intercultural settings. As it currently stands, international management research hides its political currency.

Having drawn together three key conclusions from the discussion of the research questions, I now move to consider the contribution to knowledge which this thesis might represent. For me what the above conclusions illustrate is the way in which my research project has on the one hand undermined several of the assumptions about identity and difference contained within the various literatures of international management, particularly in terms of their conception of national cultural difference. Through a discussion of the empirical evidence for instance, I have troubled international management's conventional notions of the primacy of national culture and the national manager, and the assumed nature of difference as an objective category of analysis, and also highlighted its deficient account of the political nature of identity and difference. In other words by subjecting these concepts to close critical scrutiny, I have

denaturalised and thereby subjected to critique the assumptions on which their existence rests and subsequently illuminated aspects of difference which they had masked out or ignored. On the other hand and in more positive terms, I have also suggested that the linguistic work of metonymy in producing simultaneously shifting and stable ideas of difference gives us a way of extending empirically the work of writers like Cooper and Parker. The metonymic work of ordering and dis-ordering is thus an idea which I believe contributes to the further social theorisation of identities and difference within organisational contexts.

Against this discursive background then, I would suggest that the contribution to knowledge which this thesis might claim for itself is twofold. Firstly it lies in the denaturalisation of some of international management's conventional wisdom on the nature of difference, and secondly in the advancement of the notion of metonymic ordering as a way of reconfiguring the social theorisation of difference. I have both illuminated certain aspects of IM's key concepts not considered before by IM researchers (primarily because of the hegemonic effect of the discourses of normal science and managerialism in masking out alternative approaches to their study), and extended linguistic and discursive critiques to be found in contemporary social and organisational theory. The originality of this work is an outcome of such a process of discursive unmasking and unsettling.

In denaturalising and reconfiguring some of IM's conventional wisdom, this thesis might in turn claim a wider currency for its contribution to knowledge since it also paves the way for the development of a more interdisciplinary and critical approach to the study of intercultural management and organisation. This is important since, as pointed out at the beginning of chapter two, it represents a theoretical and empirical response to the gradually increasing number of calls from within the discipline of IMR



(Casson, 1988; Redding, 1994; Buckley and Chapman, 1996; Chapman, 1997) for a greater diversity of approach. This response to these authors' calls contains two important contributory elements, one conceptual and one more broadly theoretical. Firstly, in terms of approaching the study of international and intercultural issues, chapter two made clear that although there has been increasing diversity in terms of the focus of IM research, the latter has largely involved the extension of core disciplines into the international arena, albeit at greater levels of specialisation. By and large the field has retained a clearly demarcated functional focus e.g. 'international' marketing, 'international' HRM, with little cross-fertilisation between these foci in either conceptual or empirical terms. This project represents more than just the extension of any one functional discipline into the international arena. Specifically it has taken a construct which is key to and thus transcends all these functional boundaries, that of difference, and subjected it to critical scrutiny. As such this project instantiates an attempt to foster cross-functional work and dialogue by showing how the study of a common construct can provide theoretical insight which cuts across disciplinary confines.

The second element is more broadly theoretical in nature and relates to the use of a variety of theoretical ideas emanating from disciplines outwith international management e.g. from cultural studies. This interdisciplinary contribution is important since it marks an attempt to broaden the theoretical base of international management, out from various appropriations of structural functionalism and positivism to a more sociologically and social theoretically conceived approach. To re-iterate Redding's (1994: 332) damning account of comparative management research:

*The main body of work is clustered incompetently, unadventurously, but with comfortable conformity in the positivist micro-mini theory corner. The prototypical work here is the questionnaire survey and report. Outliers exist but in apparently unattractive territory. Understanding lies in moving upwards and outwards, but this requires a more sociological perspective (...). As Sullivan*

*(1992) has argued, the positivist paradigm of economics has been allowed to define the norms of the science and its reputational criteria. One might extend this argument to say that, in the process, it has turned many potentially effective scholars into narrow and unaware conformists, and caused at least thirty years' waste.*

In regard to this quotation, I am not suggesting that this thesis marks a revolutionary theoretical sea change which will somehow overhaul the predominance of 'positivist micro mini theory', nor that this thesis is some kind of saviour of 'thirty years' waste'. Somewhat more modestly, I would suggest that the value of the interdisciplinary approach pursued in this thesis lies in its ability to shed a differential and critical light on international management's key constructs. In so doing, it contributes to a more diverse, pluralistic and perhaps even more theoretically interesting and challenging field of study.

## **7.5 Limitations**

Like any piece of research, this thesis has its limitations. These limitations lie in the inherent partiality of attempts to capture and account for any chosen aspect of social or organisational reality. This section aims to highlight the two senses in which my research can be seen to be partial. Firstly it highlights areas of the research where I have not been able to capture specific perspectives in the sufficient depth that I would have otherwise desired. In this sense, partiality resides in only being able to collect some, rather than all the social and cultural materials which might have been of relevance in empirical constructions of difference. The latter half of the section considers the political denotation of the term, exploring the effects of my privileged position in controlling the meaning which has been made of my theoretical and empirical materials. In short this section stands as testament that, like the managers, I too cannot stand outside representation and its political contingencies.



Beginning with the former meaning of partiality, there were certain perspectives on difference which might have been more extensively represented in my study. In these instances, however, there were sets of practical difficulties which meant that it was extremely problematic, if not impossible, to provide sufficient coverage of these angles. In particular there were two perspectives which might have been more fully investigated had circumstances been different, namely that of the German managers as a group and more specifically that of Vera, the German warranty claims administrator. In regard to the former first of all, whereas I had almost unlimited time and access to the Bigtruck managers, thus allowing me to interview them and spend time with them practically at my leisure, my time with and access to the German managers was limited. When meetings were held in Scotland, for example, time was tight because the managers had to get through the agenda items before returning on the six o'clock flight to Düsseldorf. As a result, I had very few opportunities to conduct post-meeting interviews with them, given that they had to leave promptly to catch their flights. Moreover because the agenda was so tightly packed and because we were in the continuous presence of at least one of the Bigtruck contingent, there was little time for small talk or casual chat during the meetings which would have provided me with data. And when I was in Dortmund with the Bigtruck managers, the converse applied, i.e. it was we who had to rush to catch flights. Given the expense of flying to Germany outwith these meetings to elicit more data on the 'German' perspective, my account of their constructions of difference lies in the two post-meeting interviews and other odd bits of chat which I had with them. Similarly with regard to Vera, I had very little opportunity to conduct additional interviews or to have extra chats with her outwith the restricted times permitted by the exigencies of the warranty meetings. Given her reservations anyway about being interviewed and recorded, this rendered it problematic to gain an in-depth perspective on her constructions of the Bigtruck managers, constructions which may

have offered resistance to their apparent discursive domination of her. On a smaller point, the fact that she was not willing to be recorded meant that I was not in a position to achieve the same level of detailed transcription of the Warranty Meetings as I had with the Service Meetings.

A further set of limitations related to the above points lay in the fact that, rather than conducting a longitudinal study of the sort where I spent an extended and continuous amount of time in any one organisation, I could almost describe myself as having 'parachuted' in and out of the organisations when collecting my data. Again this was not a matter of choice, but of circumstance. Neither organisation had the time nor resources to allow me such extensive access. Furthermore the fact that all five managers did so much travelling around the world meant that, even if I had been in the organisations for more than three days, they may not necessarily have been. Despite this, it might be suggested that I could have gained even more depth to my data collection and analysis had I carried out such a form of unbroken longitudinal study. Parachuting in and out of organisations makes it difficult to gain in-depth understanding over a longer time period. If I could reconstruct some of this research project from the beginning once again, and if it had been possible, I would bring a more ethnographic approach to the empirical study. Ethnography may have added to the depth of context expressed in this thesis as well as providing a space for more concerted attention to the extra discursive aspects of identification and differentiation.

A further limitation here is that since I placed a premium on the capture of language as social text, it was not possible to focus to the same extent on non-verbal behaviour and its related issues of body language, proxemics and kinesics. This did not mean that I paid no attention at all to non-verbal behaviour. Indeed there are several instances in my presentation of the findings where I make specific reference to body language in



terms of the way in which it serves to reinforce constructions of difference. Vocal tone and vocal performance for instance were mentioned in chapter five as being important instances of enunciative strategy. I originally wished to video record the meetings as a means of capturing elements of non-verbal behaviour which I could not concentrate on while attending to language. This however was neither feasible nor permissible. Had it been, it may have added to the account of the findings in chapter five.

I now switch to consider the more politically denotative meaning of the partiality of my research. Three key issues seem relevant here. Firstly, section 5.3.1 in chapter five provided a very clear instance of the way in which my presence within the organisation served to determine, at least to some extent, the way in which the participants constructed difference. Specifically, this section demonstrated that in bringing an ‘intercultural’ frame of reference to the research setting, I subsequently inserted this ‘way of seeing’ into the social interactions of the managers, thus ‘making’ them construct notions of difference from this particular perspective. Whether they would have used this frame of reference to construct difference anyway, that is without my presence, is a matter of speculation and conjecture. What is important to extract from this finding, however, is the ‘political’ role that I played in the meetings. Specifically it demonstrated the way in which my presence, and in particular my presentation of self through language, served to control to some extent and on certain occasions, the meaning-making process of the managers.

A second point about the politics of my research might be inferred from the way in which my identity marked me as ‘different’ as well as the ‘same’ in both positive as well as negative ways. One might speculate for instance that my identity as a man amongst an exclusively male management set, may have had an effect on the way in which Vera related to me, particularly in light of her reservations about participating

fully in the project. On a more 'pragmatic', yet illuminating note, which exemplifies the effect of my identity on the research, I gained some useful data from the fact that I was able, on account of my sex, to use the gents' toilets. This provided me with interesting 'backstage' constructions of difference from Cameron for example, but by the same token prevented me from entering the womens' toilets and thus gaining similar backstage constructs from Vera, for example. In this way, my identity can be seen to have had some very direct influences on my capacity to capture some of the differential aspects of my research topic. A further example of this which it is important to mention just briefly, relates to the political effects of the report which I produced for the Bigtruck organisation. During the 18-month research study I developed a close relationship with the Bigtruck managers to the extent that I felt that they considered me 'on their side', or 'of their point of view on the Germans'. As such when my report was released to them by the Human Resources Director, in which I had been critical of certain aspects of their collaboration with Bergbau, they seemed let down by me, perhaps even betrayed. The result of this was to throw into sharp relief that I was different from them, not just in terms of my occupation, but also in respect of the fact that I was carrying out a piece of work for the HR Department, rather than them. In this way I became an outsider again, albeit temporarily, having dared to challenge the codes which we were purported to share.

A third point relating to these political aspects of my project lay in the fact that, like the managers, I too began to develop personal constructions of difference amongst my participants which meant that I liked some of them more than others. For instance there were several times during the research where Hans's overdrawn technical explanations or repetitive requests for information began to annoy me, particularly during the meetings held during the heat of the German summer. This 'extra' discursive take on my own role shows that like the participants, I positioned the managers in social



hierarchies based *inter alia*, on whether I liked them or not, thus demonstrating that the meetings were a site for my own processes of identification and differentiation as well as those of the managers. I too was a social actor in these meetings.

In this section I have considered some of the limitations of my research in terms of its inherent partiality. I have highlighted certain underrepresented aspects which, had circumstances been different, could have given yet more depth and context to the research study. Moreover I have attempted to reflect upon the political nature of my research, looking at the way in which the study was as much a site for identification and differentiation for me as it was for the participants. Importantly however, although these limitations demonstrate the partial nature of my account of difference as a chosen aspect of intercultural organisational reality, they do not detract from the overall conclusions made by this study. The latter were derived from the in-depth insights on the aspects most fruitfully captured by the research study. As such, rather than being a threat to the reliability of the research, these limitations would seem to simply represent aspects of identification and differentiation that might be usefully focused upon to a greater extent by future researchers. They merely highlight the inherent partiality of any attempt to represent. Taking forward the conclusions stated in section 7.4 and the limitations contained within this section 7.5, the following section 7.6 reflects upon the directions in which interested future researchers might wish to develop some of the issues dealt with in this thesis.

## **7.6 Reflections and Directions for Future Research**

This final section brings the thesis to a close. Its particular aim is to point to directions which future researchers reading this thesis might wish to pursue. These issues emanate from different sources, principally the limitations of the research presented in the previous section and the conclusions of the study as outlined in section 7.4.

An obvious place to begin expanding this work is to consider examining other contexts within which intercultural management communications take place. This might involve changing some of the following for example: the 'target cultures' of the study e.g. looking at Anglo-French relations; the privileged language of the interactions e.g. exploring Anglo-German contexts where German rather than English is the main linguistic vehicle; the sectoral context of the research study e.g. looking at interactions between service providers rather than manufacturers. It is important to emphasise however, that although the interactive context might change, there is merit in pursuing further the notion of difference as a social process. A related point here is that rather than focusing on difference as a generic social process as this study has done, and thus on no particular type of identity other than that of the (national) manager, future researchers may consider focusing upon more specific managerial identities e.g. upon the perceptions and experiences of female managers in intercultural management communications, or on second generation German Turks dealing with British business people, or on the role of ethnicity as a marker of difference in IM contexts. In other words, future research might wish to concentrate upon identities and differences created at the intersections of *specific* discourses e.g. gender/ethnicity and thus be more particular in terms of choosing a sample. To this end, I would underline the critical potential of cultural studies for the conceptual reconfiguration of international management research.

A second direction for further research lies in the pursuit of ethnography (see Phipps, 1998; Jack and Phipps, 1999) as an approach to the study of intercultural management communications. I alluded to this point earlier since it represents a way of responding to some of the limitations of the present study. In the previous section I underlined the partiality of my work, noting that due to difficult circumstances, I was not able to gain



the depth I would have liked on the German perspective on the business relationship, on the role of the non-verbal in the interactions and on the extra discursive aspects of the research context in particular. The value of ethnography lies in its potential to capture all of these things to some degree through its favoured method of 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973), which aims to make broader cultural interpretations from a variety of cultural structures, knowledges and meanings. One example of its theoretical potential might be, for instance, to conceptualise business interactions as sets of kinship relations (Sahlins, 1972) looking at the ways in which social exchange fosters bonds between business people. Ethnography thereby encourages the use of social anthropological concepts in the study of (international) management, an approach which I would suggest has enormous potential for IMR. Moreover, contemporary scholarship in social and cultural anthropology (see, for example, Tyler, 1986; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Rose, 1990) provides a suitable basis for the configuration of a more critically conceived ethnography which might address further the types of political issue identified in this thesis. In sum, ethnography provides an approach to research which can usefully carry forward many of the theoretical, substantive, methodological and critical concerns of this thesis.

A third area which other researchers might find interesting involves thinking about how the key findings and discussion points contained within this thesis would impact upon teaching and learning about 'cultural' difference, both within the context of managerial training as well as that of pedagogy in secondary and higher education. One entrée into a 'critical' pedagogy of the kind impelled by this thesis would start by thinking and teaching *about* culture itself rather than just teaching culture. The difference is subtle but important. Simply teaching 'culture' invariably involves imparting pre-defined, boxed and homogenising notions of what it is to be French, German, British or whatever, perhaps best represented by approaches derived from the

work of Hofstede. This involves the problematic reduction of human alterity in the ways outlined at length earlier in the thesis. Teaching about culture is something different for it involves an understanding of representation and the political and ethical questions which this necessarily implies. As Thurlow (1999) has usefully suggested, one way of beginning a politically and ethically conceived search for the contours of the Other is to encourage the prior exoticisation of the Self.

A final direction in which I am particularly keen that this thesis is taken by interested researchers is any one which contributes to the further development of an interdisciplinary, pluralistic and more critically conceived IMR. This might well include the type of ethnography and social anthropology mentioned above. Perhaps the most important word here is pluralistic since it indexes my belief that criticality, like difference, can and should assume heterogeneous forms, thus allowing IMR to enjoy the dialogue which it has thus far lacked between similar, but differently accented normative positions. As this thesis hopes to have shown, international management research has been predominated for too long by the hegemonic structures of its inter-related discursive roots in economics, structural functionalism and positivism which have successfully managed to hide their political currency. By fostering such an interdisciplinary and critical approach to IMR, this thesis has reconfigured intercultural management communications as the site for a politics of identity and difference, and thereby rendered visible the important questions of intercultural subjugation which such a politics frequently implies.



*Appendices*

**APPENDIX ONE**

**Data Management**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Subjects</b>	<b>Material</b>	<b>Transcript</b>
30/10/1996	Interview	GMcG, GJ	Tape	1a
03/12/1996	Interview	GG, GJ	Tape	2a
03/12/1996	Interview	DC, GJ	Tape	2b
05/12/1996	Interview	Pete, GJ	Tape	3a
05/12/1996	Interview	PN, GJ	Tape	1b
11/12/1996	Service Meeting I	Cameron, Pete, Hans, Dieter, Fritz, GJ.	Tapes & Notes	4-9a
11/12/1996	Interview	Dieter, Hans, GJ.	Tape	9b
13/01/1997	Interview	SH, GJ.	Tape	10a
13/01/1997	Interview	GJ, RD.	Tape	10b
15/01/1997	Interview	Cameron, GJ, JG.	Tape	11a, 11b
11/03/1997	Warranty Meeting I	Vera, Cameron, Pete, GJ.	Notes	-
11/03/1997	Interview	Vera, GJ, RS.	Tape	12a
11- 12/03/1997	Service Meeting II	Cameron, Pete, Hans, Dieter, Fritz, GJ.	Tapes & Notes	13-16a
12/03/1997	Interview	Dieter, Hans, GJ.	Tape	17a
10/6/97	Interview	SH, GJ.	Tape	18a
1/7/97	Interview	Cameron, JG, GJ.	Tape	19a, 19b
1/7/97	Interview	PN, GJ.	Tape	20a
1/7/97	Interview	Pete, GJ.	Tape	20b
18/08/1997	Warranty Meeting II	Vera, Cameron, Pete, GJ.	Notes	-
18/08/1997	Service Meeting III	Cameron, Pete, Hans, Dieter, Fritz, GJ.	Tapes & Notes	21-23
03/11/1997	Warranty Meeting III	Cameron, Pete, Hans, Dieter, Fritz, GJ.	Notes	-
04/12/1997	Service Meeting IV	Cameron, Pete, Hans, Dieter, Fritz, GJ.	Tapes & Notes	24-28

## APPENDIX TWO

### The Technical Point of View

This Appendix contains the full transcript of an episode which transpired during Service Meeting One. It took place in Scotland, at the premises of Bigtruck, on 11 December 1996 and involved myself, Dieter, Cameron, Fritz, Pete and Hans. I have copied the transcript summary which is displayed in the main body of the thesis as Table 5.3.1: 'The Technical Point of View'. The episode is recorded on Tape 5A and is contained on pages 24 to 26 of the main transcript.

#### *Transcript Summary*

<b>Lines 1-20:</b>	Dieter asks me what I am studying, what I expect to find and what I will do with my work. I reply that I am interested in the role of culture and cultural stereotypes in business. I give examples of punctuality and precision as stereotypes of Germans. I assert the view that these stereotypes are barriers to good business.
<b>Lines 21-37:</b>	Somewhat cryptically, Dieter suggests that some things transcend cultural boundaries. He goes on to ask whether the project belongs to the discipline of economics or psychology. I reply that it belongs to international management and attempt to clarify his previous utterance. Dieter then asks whether I will build the results into a management training course. I reply "partly", but suggest that its findings are primarily of academic value.
<b>Lines 38-47:</b>	Cameron interjects and suggests that the common denominator of business is money-making and this imperative serves to level the cultural terrain. I respond positively to Cameron's suggestion and suggest the value of management training.
<b>Lines 48-61:</b>	Dieter asserts that research on the differences between Europeans and Indians, Indonesians and Chinese would be more complicated. Fritz gives an example of the differences between a typical German banker and an American one. I tell them that much research has been done into US-Japanese and Chinese cultural difference.
<b>Lines 62-72:</b>	Cameron asks me about research into Scottish and English cultural difference and suggests that there are no differences between him and Pete. Pete notes differences between Glaswegians and Edinburghers. I then note differences between Prussians and Bavarians. Dieter responds to this and then talks about Koreans.

#### *Full Transcript*

- 1 (D): May I ask you something in between because I am somehow interested to
- 2 know what are you making out of this. What are you going to find or expect to
- 3 find or not find, what is behind that?
- 4 (R): Sure, I'm looking at the influence of culture on the way in which
- 5 you do business with each other.
- 6 (D): We are not starting to shout only because you are sitting here. When you
- 7 are gone, we will do it next time.
- 8 (R): And what I expect to find is not the stereotypes and the clichés about British
- 9 people and Germans doing business. I don't think that that happens.
- 10 (F): What are the clichés?
- 11 (R): The clichés are to do with power situations, who has the power and to do



12 with the Germans being very precise and going into lots of details, about being  
forthright.

13 (H): I am still an example of that of course.

14 (R): There's also a time issue, about punctuality, a typical way in which  
15 Germans are perceived. I want to see if that bears up with what is happening  
16 between you. What I suspect is that there is a certain amount of common sense  
17 going on. You talk to each other, you make sense of one another as human  
18 beings rather than as Germans. So it's looking at values and stereotypes which  
19 hinder people's negotiating with one another. They get too hung up on fixed  
20 ideas and stereotypes and I would argue that that hinders people in negotiating  
with one another. It's quite an interesting topic.

21 (D): The technical point of view is that 2 and the other 2 must be 4. It's not  
22 something that is very easy to work out. Will you be saying you are right, you  
23 are wrong, it was like that? In which connection? What is your business? What  
are you studying? Economics or psychology?

24 (R): It's international management that I teach and this is my doctoral thesis so  
25 in broad terms, it's international management. When you talk about 2 plus 2  
26 being 4 is that necessarily an indication of you stereotypically being German,  
27 you want to know the answer or does it not really matter where you go in the  
world, two and two will always equal four?

28 (D): Two plus two can be between 1.7 and 39, so this is the difference.

29 (R): So it's quite difficult to establish and the main way I think you can do that  
30 is to listen to talk.

31 (F): I must say that I never have heard that things like this are going to be  
32 checked out.

(Lots of mumbling here)

32 (D): What could be the influence of that? You may have some results and then  
33 this would be brought into some training course for managers so that they know  
34 what they have to expect when they deal with Scottish or with German or with  
35 South Americans or whatever people is it. What is it?

36 (R): It's partly that, it's mainly the academic circle as a doctorate and to talk  
37 about wider issues which are not to do with business necessarily to do with  
sociology and social theory.

38 (C): Where is the levelling off of that, the business (...). Because (...) Hans  
39 is purely motivated in making money for the company, the same as we are (...)  
40 which is the common denominator. That really for me is the levelling off.

41 (R): Yeah sometimes misunderstandings are not necessarily to do with your  
42 cultural backgrounds and more to do with trucks and seals' failures. In terms of  
43 the training stuff, it aims to encourage managers to open up their ideas rather  
44 than to follow their stereotypes which most of us follow blindly. Research has

- 45 shown that managers are guilty of following stereotypes and preconceived ideas  
46 of what to expect and when they get into situations they automatically interpret  
47 actions and situations in terms of these stereotypes, this is typical French  
behaviour. These are the kind of things I want to deal with.
- 48 (D): Something like that has been done between other cultures, because I would  
49 suppose very much that the difference between Europeans and let's say Indians  
50 or Indonesian people or maybe people from China things like that would be  
very much more complicated.
- 51 (F): For example if a German banker wants to have a job in the States then this  
52 is also a problem because a German banker is a typical German banker who  
53 looks very anxious. He does not want to say, he does not respond just careful,  
54 opposite what an American banker is. We expect someone who thinks on his  
55 own, knows what he wants and so if a German banker wants to have a job in the  
56 States then normally this does not work because it's something totally different  
57 from what the American would expect. It is an important problem. So they  
58 look more to their social behaviour and typical behaviour than their knowledge  
59 because knowledge is something you can learn but behaviour is something that  
is born. Culture is vital therefore this is a very interesting study.
- 60 (R): A lot of what has been done is Americans and Chinese or Japanese. This at  
61 first sight is an easier study because the differences are so pronounced.
- 62 (C): What about Scots and English culture?
- 63 (R): That might be my next thing. You could even go as far as in Scotland itself.
- 64 (C): I don't perceive there's any difference in my outlook from Pete's, I really  
don't.
- 65 (P): There are differences between Edinburghers and Glaswegians.
- 66 (R): I know a couple of people who work in different subsidiaries of IBM and  
67 Hewlett Packard in different parts of this country. They notice differences. It's  
68 the same in Germany, you might notice the difference between a Bavarian and a  
Prussian.
- 69 (D): I was going to say that. He (referring to Hans) is close to Bavaria but not a  
70 typical Bavarian. For a Korean it is important not to lose face in front of his  
boss.
- 71 (C): I don't know what the stereotype behaviour is for Bavarians, it is very  
72 stereotypical, they just fall into the same position every time.



APPENDIX THREE

The Chinese

This Appendix contains the full transcript of an episode which transpired during Service Meeting One. It took place in Scotland, at the premises of Bigtruck, on 11 December 1996 and involved myself, Dieter, Cameron, Fritz, Pete and Hans. I have copied the transcript summary which is displayed in the main body of the thesis as Table 5.4.7: ‘The Chinese’. The episode is recorded on Tape 6A and is contained on pages 34 and 35 of the main transcript.

Transcript Summary

Lines 1-7	Pete asserts that the damming programme being undertaken at the three gorges is a potential environmental disaster.
Lines 8-13	Hans draws parallels between Chinese attitudes to such a potential catastrophe and their attitudes to human rights. More specifically he suggests that since the Chinese do not care about human rights, they are, by implication, not likely to care about any potential ecological disaster.
Lines 13-28	Pete then moves to tell everybody that all Chinese people have bicycles. In expanding on the subject of Chinese bicycle ownership he recounts his observations of employees at Bigtruck’s North Hauler factory in another part of China. He tells how they all pedal their bicycles out of the factory gates at knock-off time in a very orderly fashion.
Lines 30-46	Hans then invites Pete to expand on his description of the Chinese by asking him about his past dealings with them. He says he found them very friendly, not at all aggressive, that they have awful writing paper and that they are not as industrious as he had imagined.

Full Transcript

- 1 (P): Destined to the biggest ecological disaster in the world, isn't it?
- 2 (F): Yes.
- 3 (P): When they dammed the Yangtze and do all sorts of damage.
- 4 (F): (mumbles) (...) for power supply.
- 5 (P): Mmmhm.
- 6 (F): They will change the whole geography there and they do not know what
- 7 will happen when they are done.
- 8 (H): But people who do not consider human rights couldn't possibly care less
- 9 about something like that.
- 10 (F): Thousands and thousands of people are living there.
- 11 (P): All the villages and towns.
- 12 (F): About 400 metres. (F points to the map)

13 (H): They want to make their own mistakes

14 (P): Yip. 1.2 billion people, every one with a bicycle some have two bicycles.  
 15 Funny, where we've got Northhaul we've got 500 people all with bicycles and  
 16 when it comes to knocking off time they all line up outside of the gates then they  
 17 open the gates and I was expecting to see them rush you know like they would  
 18 here when they come out of works in the old days. But they don't they just pedal  
 19 very slowly all in a line, nobody overtakes anybody, very orderly and as soon as  
 20 and they close the town to traffic. No cars are allowed for, I think, it's 20  
 21 minutes after knocking-off time as it would kill thousands of them. But they are  
 22 very orderly you know, I expected to see them all rushing and tearing about you  
 know but they just pedal slowly down the road.

23 (H): That reminds me there was this cabby with his bicycle working in a bicycle  
 24 factory and everyday he took a sack of sand out with him you know, and one  
 25 day he retired, so eh the gentleman at the gate said to him, "look you have been  
 26 stealing something, although I checked the sand occasionally and never found  
 27 anything. Now tell me since you retired what you have been pinching". He said  
 the bicycle.

28 (Lots of laughing).

29 (H): But how are the Chinese when you deal with them?

30 (P): I was surprised, they were very friendly (...), they are not aggressive at all  
 31 they are very mild people. (sounds very earnest)

32 (D): They write everything down.

33 (P): Oh yeah yeah

34 (D): And they tend to be writing memos at the same time and the next day they  
 35 tell you but yesterday at ten minutes past four you said (...).

36 (P): And they have awful paper, don't they, like tissue paper, very thin and they  
 37 invented paper didn't they, the Chinese, you know awful paper.

38 (H): Marco Polo brought a few sheets.

38 (P): Yeah (...) they weren't as industrious as I imagined they would be, they  
 39 all have settees in their offices, chairs.

40 (H): Maybe you should go back to that.

41 (P): Yeah (...) a step backwards.

42 (P): And the vegetables were good, but some of the meat I was a bit doubtful  
 43 about, but the vegetables were very good.

44 (D): I haven't been there personally, but we have something with them which  
 45 started when I started with OK in 1975.



## APPENDIX FOUR

### Engineering codes and steering pumps

This Appendix contains the full transcript of an episode which transpired during Service Meeting Three. It took place in Germany, at the premises of Bergbau, on 1 August 1997 and involved myself, Dieter, Cameron, Pete and Hans. I have copied the transcript summary which is displayed in the main body of the thesis as Table 5.5.2: 'Engineering codes and steering pumps'. The episode is recorded on Tape 22A and is contained on pages 41 to 48 of the main transcript.

#### *Transcript Summary*

**Lines 1-15:** Pete introduces item 126 on the agenda. He informs Hans and Dieter that he had been discussing the commercial nature of this item earlier on in the morning with Vera. Hans remarks that he is only interested in the technical side of this item. Lines 5-15 document an extended turn from Hans in which he outlines the seriousness of this problem and asks about the provision of a suitable solution.

**Lines 16-37:** Cameron informs Hans that they are waiting for their engineering department to approve a particular solution and that this will take some time. Cameron does not however divulge any specific information about the solution being considered by engineering. As a result of this, Hans consistently tries to draw Pete and Cameron to give him more engineering details, asking then what they think the solution might look like.

**Lines 38-50:** Following Hans's insistent requests, Cameron gives an extended outline of his suggested solution drawing on engineering codes. Hans replies by supporting Cameron's technical suggestions.

**Lines 51-77:** Cameron then begins to embellish his technical account, but Hans intervenes here in order to correct Cameron, a move which Cameron immediately opposes with counterfactual information. Following a short interjection from Pete, Cameron goes on to give an engineering account of the problem with the pumping system as it stands. In a subsequent turn he emphasises the role of a good design solution.

**Lines 78-97:** Hans says that he is not happy and Cameron tells him to speak his mind. He says that he does not feel he has learned anything from the discussions to reassure him about the state of this issue. Dieter suggests an alternative solution to the one proposed by Cameron, but this is categorically rejected first by Pete and then by Cameron.

#### *Full Transcript*

- 1 (P): 126, the steering pumps. Well we talked about this, this morning when you came in with Vera and (...).
- 2 (H): So eh this was the financial aspect which I am not at all aware of. I don't
- 3 know what claims you have accepted and those which you have rejected. We were only interested in (P interrupts).
- 4 (P): The technical solutions.
- 5 (H): Considering the failure statistics which pointed the direction, we were just
- 6 hoping we could get something from you and we were also hoping to learn from
- 7 you what kind of knowledge you have already, what kind of information you

8 have already gathered or, in collaboration with your engineering colleague  
9 possibly. Because we would rather be interested to see at this point whether we  
10 can count on a solution, on a well founded solution, within an acceptable period  
11 of time in order to overcome very, very massive problems. I mean we have got  
12 through it, it is not only the cost and it is not only the pump replacement, it is the  
13 whole hydraulic system which seems to riddle people and also what we have to  
14 do in cases of a pump failure, or to avoid a pump failure. And possibly should  
15 in addition to solutions, maybe issue, publish something on preventative  
measures, on actions to do when they have the problem to give to somebody. A  
guide on what to go by.

(Some turns further)

16 (C): I think what Pete is saying there Hans is we have got to wait until our  
17 engineering department approves or defines the action that has got to be taken  
whether that will include (...).

18 (H): We are requesting this because we feel that this may have something to do  
19 with the (mumbled) it has recently been pointed out, but never officially and you  
20 know before we alter something in this system we would like to have your  
blessing.

21 (P): I am sure we have got to tell you what to do. It's up to us.

22 (H): Now this will only happen, the service alert in my opinion would only be  
23 (mumbled) you can issue at short notice an immediate measure and then on top  
of that we would require a solution.

24 (P): A field fix.

25 (H): Any sort of indication on what you intend doing. I mean this is too vague  
26 in my opinion to be (...) I mean this we take absolutely for granted.

27 (P): I can't tell you what we are doing because I don't know.

28 (H): I mean the MIR which we have submitted must have had a certain effect.  
29 They haven't come up with a solution yet.

30 (C): The engineering department only started work last Sunday. They were off  
31 for three weeks, so (...).

32 (H): But gentlemen, surely you have spent thought on this issue before having  
33 received our (interrupted by P).

34 (P): We don't know. You can minute that engineering are looking at it as a  
35 matter of urgency so we haven't got a solution. We would be leading you up the  
36 garden path if we told you what we are going to do.

37 (H): What kind of feelings do you have? Is it a very massive issue, is it finance?

38 (C): From my standpoint, what (...) from my standpoint that last statement we  
39 put in the minute was my perception of the problem and it probably is as it



40 stands to a great respect. Some issues on the K100s , if you look at them in  
41 isolation, there is at least two of them. Vicars have one pump and said there is a  
42 problem with the guts of the pump and the other one that Vera goes on about  
43 that she showed this morning, that was rejected for contamination. There was  
44 probably a case in there that there is a problem with the pump. From a quality  
standpoint I would separate the K100 issues because I believe that that's the  
problem with the brake pump.

45 (H): This we would fully support because eh you know if it involves quite some  
46 effort in advising you the way we do (...) then we would like to have some  
47 reward back and by pointing out to you, if you hadn't had this conclusion, that if  
48 everything points in the direction that pump failures are negligible on every  
49 other model apart from K95 and K110. So this should be a very clear indication  
as to where to start.

50 (P): The difference between them. It's quite a simple system.

51 (C): In general terms, you have got two years or 5000 hours and then things start  
to go haywire.

52 (H) (interrupts) Cameron, again I would like to point out that we have, you may  
53 have (mumbled) it was not as high as 5, 6, 7000 hours, it was starting at 180  
hours.

54 (C): No, the issue with the 100s I think is slightly clouding it because we have  
55 had at least two reports from Vicars that they have accepted that there is quality  
56 issue on the compensator. The compensator jamming which is probably  
57 the problem with the K100s, because it is a different pump form the K95. It is a  
58 different steering pump, a different part number and a different configuration.

59 (P): Nevertheless we have got to solve the problem.

59 (C): Nevertheless there is something going wrong with the system, it goes out of  
60 kilter and then it flares the system up, temperature wise and then if the  
61 temperature goes up, the pump is working at above its rated temperature. The  
62 lubrication and the slippers in the face go and the pump gives right and then  
63 starts contaminating the system, all through the system. And if you are not  
64 really diligent and pulling the system apart and cleaning the whole thing out,  
65 then you just revisit it very quickly again and a lot of the issues which we have  
66 seen (...) and I am not trying to justify Bigtruck's position here, but a lot of the  
67 failures that we see are because people are less diligent at doing it. The system  
68 has flared up, again clean a little bit, stick in a new pump and then maybe in 200  
69 hours later they revisit the problem. But the issue really from an engineering  
70 standpoint is what are the conditions which have led to the initial flare-up? And  
how do we negate that? And that is what I am trying to focus on.

71 (H): Well you see Cameron, the (mumbled) that are referring to is also very  
72 high, most and this is sometimes preventing people to (C interrupts)

73 (C): Well we can argue about this forever and a day. What we keep telling our  
74 engineering department is that forget all the (...), when ZF when you go to them  
75 and you say there is a problem there at, and you haven't done that, this minor

76 detail is not right and that minor detail is right, forget that. It's a (...) a design  
77 should be tolerant, it should be tolerant enough to withstand all of these  
parameters. If it lacks tolerance then it is not a good design.

(Some turns further)

78 (P): OK? No?

79 (H): I'm not happy.

80 (C): Well, speak your mind then.

81 (H): I am still.

82 (D): It is still completely open when we (...), we don't know when we can  
expect.

83 (H): I was hoping actually to learn something that would comfort us or be able  
84 to pass something on to (mumbled).



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